

STARBURST

SCIENCE FANTASY IN TELEVISION, CINEMA AND COMICS

**BATTLESTAR
GALACTICA**
full review

**SUPERMAN
-THE MOVIE**
effects secrets

**INVASION
of the BODY
SNATCHERS**

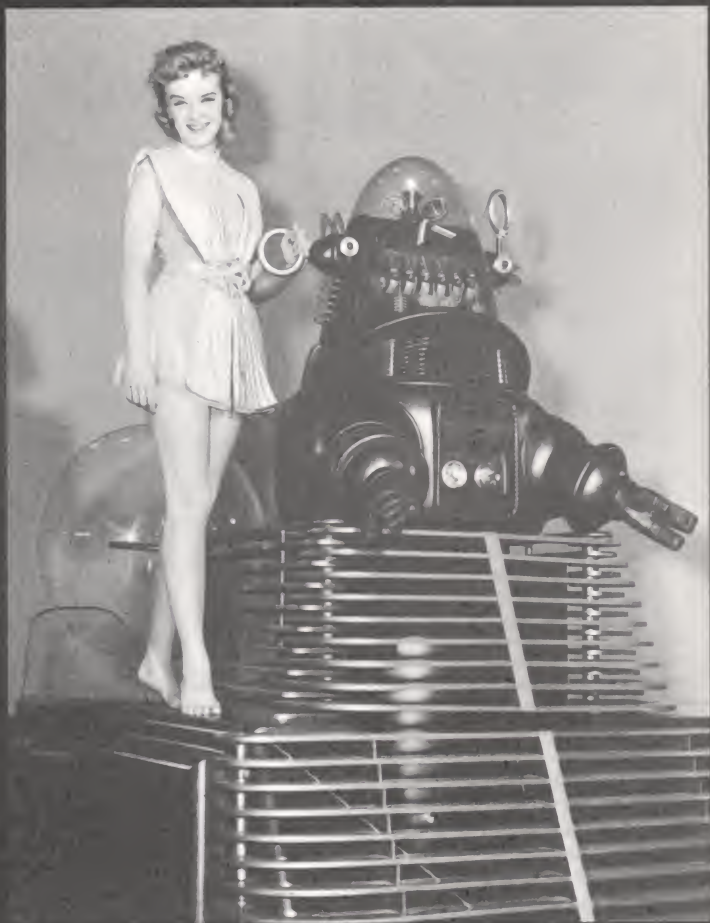
**MECHANICAL
MEN of the MOVIES**

EXCLUSIVE



New Animated Fantasy Film





Mechanical Men of the Movies - see page 26.

STARBURST

SCIENCE FANTASY IN TELEVISION, CINEMA AND COMICS

Vol. 1 No. 7 March 1979

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In answer to all your letters, this month we take a really close look at the making of the world's most expensive feature film—*Superman The Movie*.

John Brosnan (author of such excellent books as *Movie Magic*, *The Horror People* and *Future Tense*) has tracked down three of the key figures in the transition from the comic-book Man of Steel to his celluloid counterpart: Derek Meddings, Colin Chivers and Roy Field.

We hope their views will not only interest you all, but answer many of the questions you have doubtless been asking.

Future interviews will be dealing with the upcoming *Moonraker* 007 movie, *Alien*, *The Forever War* and *Battlestar Galactica*.

Almost as a preview to next month's look at the latest science fiction box office smash in America, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (starring Leonard Nimoy and Donald Sutherland), this issue takes a retrospective glance at the original Don Siegel classic of 1956.

As ever we look forward to your views on this issue and your ideas for upcoming features.

Best wishes,

Dez Skinn

Editor

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Battlestar GALACTICA



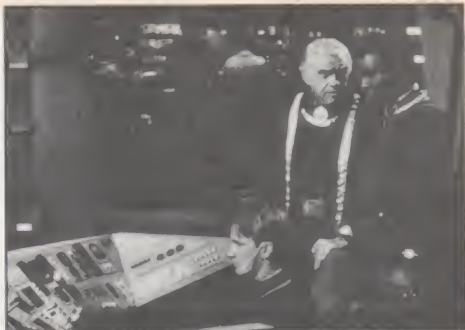
Fifteen years ago MGM approached producer Gene Roddenberry to create a new tv series. He outlined an idea he had been nursing for almost five years, "a sort of wagon train to the stars". He gave it the working title *Star Trek*. Roddenberry's description of his show was meant to convey the concept of stories of ordinary people—ordinary but for the fact the tales would be set in space. Unfortunately the series never turned out that way. *Star Trek* never materialised as the struggle of Man to survive in a hostile environment.

Now, however, while *Star Trek* has long faded from the tv screens and has yet to resurface as the long-promised feature film, the original "wagon train to the stars" concept has been revived.

Television producer Glen Larson has created a concept that mingles the pioneering spirit of the wild west wagon trains with the spectacle of *Star Wars*. The result is an action-packed though edited down, 100 minute tv pilot-turned-movie followed by a weekly series on the small screen.

In an age of such polished tv movies—or telemovies—that they often outshine theatrically intended feature films, *Battlestar Galactica* has created a confusing first in its unique release pattern.

Made for MCA/Universal, it first popped up late last year as a feature film



Commander Adama (Lorne Greene) and Colonel Tigh (Jerry Carter) in command on the bridge of the Battlestar Galactica.

in Canadian cinemas. Science fiction fans in America crossed the border in droves to see the movie that threatened to usurp *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*' top popularity spots. Next, it was the turn of Canadian science fiction fans to zoom over to America to see the (longer) tv released

version of the same. But still the public wasn't satisfied. Even though *Battlestar Galactica* had, by then, settled into a regular US tv slot. And so the tv pilot/movie was released theatrically in the USA with the added bonus of the Universal Sensurround technique.



The glittering coldness of the Cylons' appearance adds to their air of menace.



The insect-like Ovioms store their prisoners in honey-comb-like compartments for later use as food.

All this across the Atlantic, while in Europe we wait. **Battlestar** was originally to move straight into a tv slot over here, testing the market with two pilot shows before running into a complete series. But, critics will no longer be able to dismiss it (or praise it?) as the "tv **Star Wars**". For here, too, the initial pair of pilot episodes

have been spliced together (and no, you can't see the join) for theatrical release through CIC this Easter. Beyond that? My calculated guess would be the independent network will pick the on-going series for their Autumn schedule.

But enough theory, on to the plot . . . **Battlestar Galactica** is set in the 75th

Century. It is a time of conflict and turmoil. Man has been at war with an alien race for a thousand years. Yet even now, this millenium of continuous battle is drawing to a close. A special convoy, representing the twelve planetary colonies of man, is cruising towards a rendezvous point for peace talks with leaders of the Cylon



A close-up of a Cylon fighter shows the incredible detail of the models used.



The Battlestar Galactica. Though it appears to be huge the model is, in fact, only 72 inches in length.

Empire. Aboard the flagship of this Convoy are Adar, President of the Twelve Colonies (played by *Lew Ayers*), Commander Adama (*Lorne Greene*), his daughter Athena (*Maren Jensen*) and the Council of the Twelve Colonies.

As the occupants of the flagship discuss the prospect of peace, a routine patrol of two Colonial Viper fighters cruise the area surrounding the convoy, the pilots being the two sons of Commander Adama, Apollo and Zac. The brothers chat idly over their short-range radios but their conversation is interrupted when they spot a Cylon tanker apparently drifting in the depths of space. They investigate. As Apollo approaches the tanker he begins to pick up a strange static on his scanners. Apollo's Viper fighter swoops around the drifting tanker and comes face to face with . . . a veritable armada of Cylon ships. Thousands of enemy fighters lie in wait for the approach of the Colonial peace convoy. The proposed peace talks are no more than a ruse to lure the leaders of the twelve colonies of man into the open.

Apollo and Zac turn tail and race back towards the main body of the convoy. They know it is imperative that they warn their superiors of the Cylon fleet. But the aliens jam their radio frequencies. Their only chance is to outrun their pursuers and hope that the convoy pick up the marauders on their scanners before it is too late. But, eager for war to end and fooled by the traitor in their midst, the council refuse to believe anything could go wrong. Surrounded as they are by the might of the twelve intergalactic battlestar space cruisers, they consider themselves invulnerable on this, a mission of peace. Lorne Greene as Adama (well used to his sons getting into tricky spots, on horseback or now in spacecraft) pleads with the council but to no avail.

Despite orders against even preparing for an attack, he decides to stage a special

"drill" and make his weapons ready. And so, when Apollo returns from patrol alone—except for the huge alien fleet in pursuit, only Adama's battlestar The Galactica is ready to defend herself against the vast onslaught.

So, in a *tour de force* of special effects genius, we witness the entire fleet, battlestars, council and all, destroyed by the

metal-clad Cylon warrior force. All except The Galactica. It is then the final crushing blow comes. The human survivors learn that while their battlestars had been kept busy in space by the Cylon fighters, an auxiliary force of Cylons had devastated their home planets. And so the remnants of the human race, under the leadership of Commander Adama and the protection of



The mechanical dog or "daggitt" of the show was created by placing a chimpanzee inside a metal and fur costume.



Dog-fight in space. Colonial Viper fighters flee from the treacherous attack of the Cylons.

The *Galactica* take to space in search of the legendary lost colony of man. A planet in a galaxy hundreds of light years from their homes. The show *Battlestar Galactica* can hardly deny having its roots implanted in the trend created by *Star Wars*. It too is high on thrills and action and unhindered by scene after scene of heavy

dialogue. The visual concepts have been designed to outstrip every sf movie to date as far as impact is concerned.

Not surprisingly the man behind the special effects, John Dykstra, lists *Star Wars* among his previous credits.

"I think," says Dykstra, "In terms of shooting spaceships in space, the effects in *Galactica* are easily as good as the effects in *Star Wars* if not better.

In fact, the effects for *Galactica* were photographed using a modified version of the system used for *Star Wars*. The Dykstraflex camera had its beginnings in the workshop of Douglas Trumbull (special effects on *2001* and *Close Encounters*) and was modified extensively by Dykstra for *Star Wars* and *Battlestar Galactica*.

Heading the cast of relative unknowns on *Battlestar Galactica* is tv veteran Lorne Greene. Now aged 63 and many times a millionaire from his *Bonanza* days Greene toyed with the idea of bowing out of the series. But producer Glen Larson managed to persuade the actor that the show could not cope without him. Larson saw Greene as "the guy who pulls it all together. He has family appeal. His warmth will make people feel comfortable in a cold place like space."

Greene has high hopes for the human

element in *Battlestar* though he is worried that the spectacular special effects may begin to wear thin after a while. "Special effects are good for three or four weeks," he says. "After that you have to have situations and characters that grab the mind." A fact that has been proved by all the great sf movies since *Metropolis*.



Captain Apollo (Richard L. Hatch) is the oldest son of Commander Adama.



Commander Adama (Lorne Greene) is the patriarchal leader of the quest to find the lost thirteenth colony of man.

Maya Merchandising

The following is a list of some of the fantasy film magazines and books available from us. For our full catalogue send a large self-addressed envelope. All prices include postage—overseas customers please note that orders will be sent by surface mail. Please make cheques/postal orders payable to MAYA MERCHANDISING and send to us at 52 Roydene Road, Plumstead, London SE18 1QA.

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SPIDERMAN

THE EFFECTS

"You'll believe a man can fly!" say the ad-lines. But making Superman fly was only one of the problems that beset the special-effects men working on the multi-million dollar film. *Starburst* talked to some of the men behind the movie illusions: Colin Chilvers, Derek Meddings and Roy Field.

Feature by John Brosnan

Without doubt *Spiderman* is the biggest special effects movie to be made in England since 2001: A *Space Odyssey* (though much of *Star Wars* was filmed in England the model effects were all shot in the USA). Not surprisingly, it involved a huge team of British effects men, including Les Bowie, Colin Chilvers, Derek Meddings, Wally Veevers, Roy Field, Denys Coop, John Richardson, Zoran Perisic, Denis Rich and Charles Staffell.

Recently I had the opportunity to speak to three of the effects supervisors who worked on *Spiderman*—The Movie; Colin Chilvers (who was in charge of all the physical and mechanical effects in the sequences shot in England), Derek Meddings (who supervised the model photography) and Roy Fields (who was responsible for all the optical work).

Colin Chilvers —mechanical effects

Colin Chilvers started his special effects career as an apprentice working for Les Bowie's effects group back in the 1960s—like many other of Britain's top effects people who had also received initial training with veteran effects expert Les Bowie. He then worked as an assistant for another effects supervisor before becoming a fully-fledged supervisor himself in 1974. His first assignment was to provide all the effects in Ken Russell's *Tommy*, followed by another Russell film, *Lizomania*, and Richard Lester's *The Ritz*. Other assignments followed and then came *Spiderman* which has so far consumed two and a half years of Chilvers' life and will consume a lot more before he will be able to say goodbye to the man in the blue suit.

I asked him if he had any idea when he became involved in the picture that it was going to take so long to make.

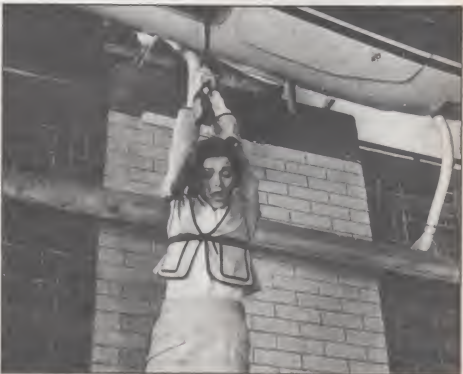
"No," said Chilvers, "I think I started

in March 1976 and we were supposed to begin shooting in September that year but we didn't actually start until March the following year. We began at Pinewood, then we went to Bray Studios, then to Italy... then back to Shepperton, and later we moved back into Pinewood. It grew in length because it was the type of film that had never been attempted before. *Spiderman* has been filmed before, of course, but never very successfully because they always had problems making the guy look as if he was really flying. That was the big nut to crack.

"The reason that I got the job on *Spiderman*," continued Chilvers, "not having any delusions of grandeur about myself as an effects supervisor, was that at the time that the picture was beginning to prepare there just weren't a lot of supervisors about who

were available—everyone was busy on other films. But having just finished a picture I was available, and it also helped that I knew both the art director and the director, who at that time was to be Guy Hamilton.

"Originally there were only three effects supervisors involved—Les Bowie, Roy Field and myself. I was to do all the physical effects and the flying. Les all the models and Roy the opticals. But the film just grew and grew, and as it progressed other supervisors were hired. Wally Veevers was brought in to do the flying and the front projection because it was decided it would be too big a job for me to handle both the flying and the physical effects. So I just handled the exterior flying sequences. You needed two different crews to prepare



Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) hangs from Colin Chilvers' full-size mock-up helicopter.



An example of Colin Chilvers' spectacular "physical effects" in the sequence where the spaceship rises within Jor-el's disintegrating laboratory.

the flying scenes, one in the studio and one outside. I worked mostly with Derek Botell who is the leading wire expert in this country, and when Wally left to go on another picture we ended up doing the rest of the flying."

I then asked Colin Chilvers one of the same questions that I was to ask both Derek Meddings and Roy Field—were all those press stories about it being necessary to re-shoot many of the flying sequences true?

"No," said Chilvers emphatically, "they weren't true. There were problems with the flying, of course, but the big problem was that you were dealing with a guy who had fantastic powers and you didn't just have to show him doing all these incredible things but you had to make them *believable*! If he lifted, for instance, the Empire State Building people would have laughed so Dick Donner decided to play his powers down. Everyone knows that Superman can jump mountains and everything but you had to scale down what you had him doing on the screen to avoid making him look ridiculous. You had to actually believe that a person could do what you were seeing... the effects had to relate to people."

The next question was, of course, how were the flying sequences done? Wires or what?

"Well yes, wires were used on some scenes but they are actually very restrictive. If you want to make someone fly, wires seem to be the obvious answer but they're not. First of all the wire has to be of a size that would support the actor's weight, and that makes it difficult to conceal. It also depends on the background as to what sort

of wire you use and also how high off the ground you want him to be and what movements you want him to make. For sudden, jerky movements you need thicker wires to ensure they won't snap under the sudden strain. And the biggest problem with wires is starting and stopping the actor, because first you need an acceleration time, then time to make the actual shot you require, and then a de-acceleration time. Well, it's pretty difficult to find a stage big enough to get all that in. And you've got the other physical problems, going round corners and going up and down at the same time. So the actual wire flying was kept to an absolute minimum."

So how then did Superman fly the rest of the time?

"Well, for one shot of him flying four or five different processes might have been involved. Travelling mattes, etc. Often we used a hydraulic arm to support him... we used special suits and special capes and other rigs that concealed whatever was keeping him aloft. But the biggest boon to us in the flying scenes was the front projection process which we were able to zoom in on and that kept him in relation with the background he was flying against. If we'd been forced to keep the camera static it would have looked as if he was just suspended in front of a projection plate. But they devised a way of being able to move him in relation to the background so that it looks as if he's really flying."

I then asked Chilvers how Superman's actual take-offs were achieved. Was the old device of having the actor bounce off an out-of-camera springboard (a favourite gimmick in the 1950s Superman TV

series) utilised? "On a couple of occasions, yes," said Chilvers, "but on most occasions he was on wires, or something else..."

And what did Chilvers think of Superman himself, Christopher Reeve? "He was marvellous, he worked himself into the ground. The great thing about him was that lots of times he was obviously very uncomfortable but he could still act wonderfully... he still looked as if he could fly no matter what he was actually suffering. We tried to keep his comfort in mind when we were hanging him on wires or fixing him onto rigs but it was not always possible. We had other people to use as stand-ins for him, like stunt-men, but Chris had this thing about *being* Superman and as soon as you put someone else on the wires or on the rig they just didn't fly like Chris..."

Apart from a lot of the flying scenes, what else did Colin Chilvers do on *Superman*? "All the mechanical effects, like Superman smashing doors down, boring underground, lifting cars... anything that moved I was involved in really. The destruction of Krypton was a major task—that was when we had Marlon Brando over here for two weeks and there was a lot of money involved, so every minute counted. We had to be well prepared for that and it turned out to be quite a fortnight's work. We used a lot of hydraulic equipment in those sequences—crystals had to come up through the floor, chasms had to open up in front of the actors, things were shattering all over the place... we had lots of tip tanks dumping rubbish on people, bits of styro-foam and masses of silver 'glitter' and other debris."

One of Chilvers' biggest tasks on *Superman* was the sequence where the helicopter, carrying Lois Lane (Margot Kidder), goes out of control when taking off from the roof of the Daily Planet building. "The script required it to crash on the roof, then it had to hang over the edge of the skyscraper and finally fall. It was difficult because we were dealing



"Christopher Reeve was great. He worked himself into the ground"—Colin Chilvers.



Superman's cape was sometimes used to conceal the support rig—as this shot reveals.

with a full-sized helicopter. Finally we had to make our own mock-up and it weighed more than real helicopter—over a ton and a half. We had people inside it as well, and then the girl had to hang underneath it on the strap, so we had to bear their safety in mind when we were trying to get it to do what the script required. When it was spinning out of control on the roof it was mounted on a special hydraulic device, and when it was falling off the edge it was suspended from a large crane. A problem was getting the rotors to move at the right speed—300 rpm or whatever the speed actually is—so that people wouldn't look at it and say: 'Oh, that's a mock-up'. Also our helicopter had to match with the footage of a real helicopter that was actually shot landing on and taking off from a roof in New York."

I asked Chilvers whether he found it a strain working on such a big movie for such a long period of time. "I didn't find it a strain from the mental point of view but it was *physically* a strain because you had five different units shooting at the same time and that meant you only had a certain number of people available to work with on a particular job. Sometimes on a special effects shot you may need 25 or 30 people and the next week you may only need 3 or 4 but I was restricted to a crew of about 15 people and with that 15 I had to organise it so that I always had enough people at the right place at the right time... and *that* was often more of a strain than devising the actual special effects."

On the subject of devising effects I asked whether any break-throughs had been made in the development of equipment for the physical effects in *Superman*. "Well, you can't really call them break-throughs," said Chilvers, "with physical effects you use whatever is at hand—you haven't

got the time to develop a specific piece of equipment. What you do is utilise anything you can actually go out and buy—like hydraulic pumps, rams, valves, etc. It's all conventional equipment but we use it in very unconventional ways. We never really get the opportunity to develop new equipment and devices—we basically just do very peculiar things with existing equipment."

Overall, how did Chilvers think *Superman* ranked as a technical achievement? "Well, considering the majority of the people who worked on it were good technicians but had never been involved with something as gigantic as this before in their careers we all did a very good job. Obviously you'll get some members of the audience who will go just to pick holes in it and say they see wires—which they won't. In a way one must look upon part of the time we spent on the first *Superman* film as a research and development period—working out how to make the guy fly and appear to have superhuman strength—which we can put to use in the second film. In fact there's going to be far more action in *Superman Part 2* than there was in Part 1—a helluva lot more action because in Part 2 you've got the three villains who also have super powers. They're the ones you see imprisoned in the Phantom Zone at the beginning of Part 1. In Part 2 they come down to destroy the Earth and go around smashing up everything in sight..."

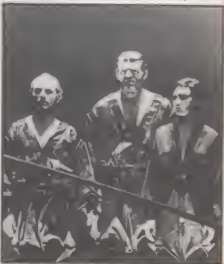
My final question was whether he was tired of *Superman* after spending 2½ years already on the project and now facing a further indefinite period of further work on Part 2: "No, not at all," said Chilvers. "One of the things about *Superman* that you come across very rarely is that the whole crew worked well together—there were no prima donnas—and this applied

right up to Richard Donner himself. If you didn't like something that was being done you could go and see Dick and say that you didn't like it. From the personal point of view as well as the professional he was the best director I've ever worked with. He actually *worries* about you, not just at work but he worries about you at home too. You could arrive home after a particularly hard piece of work and find a case of wine waiting with a note saying: 'Thank you, Richard', which shows that he not only appreciates your efforts but is thinking of you. Not all directors are like that..."

Derek Meddings —model photography

Compared to Colin Chilvers and Roy Field, Derek Meddings spent a relatively short time working on *Superman*—a 'mere' seven months. Of course, on any other film seven months of special effects work would be something out of the ordinary. Meddings is probably Britain's top model effects expert and is best known for his work on television's *Thunderbirds* and on the last few James Bond films such as *The Man With the Golden Gun* and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (both films, particularly the latter, contain much more model work than the average film-goer realises).

When I spoke to Derek Meddings recently he was in the midst of months of effects work for the latest Bond epic *Moonraker* which features a climactic battle between space shuttles and the villain's vast space station (there will be more about his work on *Moonraker* in future issues). I asked him what he'd done on *Superman*. "I supervised all the miniatures, such as the destruction of Krypton and the sequence with the San Francisco bridge after the earthquake. For the latter we built a very big miniature of the bridge at Pinewood complete with a pool of



"In Superman II you have three supervillains who also have super-powers."—Cain Chilvers.

water beneath it to represent the San Francisco Bay. We did all the vehicles travelling across the bridge, the scenes where it starts to crack up, cars smashing into each other and the school bus swerving to avoid the crack in the surface and then crashing through the railing to hang suspended on the edge of the parapet—all in miniature. This was intercut with shots of full-sized vehicles that we filmed on a section of the bridge built on an airfield but as this wasn't built above the ground we could never show over the side of the full-size section—so whenever you see a shot in the film showing over the side of the bridge and the water below, that was all done in miniature . . . I think it's an excellent sequence. But I shouldn't say that, should I?"

Having seen the sequence I told him to go right ahead because it *is* excellent and the model shots are impossible to detect.

I then asked if he had been responsible for the actual blowing up of the planet Krypton when it collides with the sun. "No, I didn't do that . . . we did the shots of the ice city, where Jor-El has his laboratory, when it starts to fall to bits and the crystal stalagmites penetrate its sides. We built a very, very large miniature that included the city itself and the surrounding Krypton landscape. It was very complicated and rigged with all sorts of devices and small explosive charges so that all the various sections would collapse on cue. Then we had to show the spaceship, containing the baby Superman, emerging

from the roof of Jor-El's laboratory and moving over the city . . ."

Returning to the subject of the exploding Krypton I said that I thought the sequence in *Superman* shared the same fault as the similar shots in *Star Wars* when the planet, and later the Death Star, were blown up—the actual explosions were over too quickly for objects that were so big. An exploding planet shouldn't disintegrate immediately but should break up slowly at first, to suggest some of the immensity of the object involved. But I realized that this effect would be difficult to achieve with a model because you would have to use either a gigantic model or film it at an impossibly high speed (all miniature explosions are filmed with high-speed cameras, thus slowing up the process when projected at normal speed on a screen and making the explosion seem a realistic full-size).

"Yes," said Meddings, "but it's always the problem when you get into the area of trying to do something different with explosions. The only way you can do that sort of shot, really, is to attach the model to the roof of the stage and shoot it from below. When the charge goes off all the pieces fall down towards the camera—it's probably the only way you can do it at the moment for the simple reason that if you're in space and an explosion happens the fragments expand uniformly in all directions because of the lack of gravity . . . but there's a limit to the size of the model (and explosive charge) that you can use in these circumstances." He paused and then said:

"I'm hesitating in answering because I'm thinking of what we've got to do on *Moonraker* . . . we've a lot of explosions in space and certainly at *this* moment I can't think of anything new or special that I can do with them . . ."

Speaking of *Star Wars* I asked if the release of *Star Wars*, which occurred halfway through the production of *Superman*, had any influence on the style of the special effects in *Superman*: "No," said Meddings. "*Star Wars* came out during the time I was working on *Superman* and by that time it was too late to do anything or to change the script. But Dick Donner wouldn't have wanted to copy anything from *Star Wars* anyway, which I think is the right attitude to have."

I then asked the inevitable question: were all the rumours about the problems with the flying sequences true: "I'll probably get hung for saying this but . . ." said Meddings, and then he paused before continuing, "they spent a lot of time and a lot of money on *Superman* and I admire the director and the producers for going as far as they've gone because it's the sort of picture that if the special effects aren't convincing then that's the end of it. But as Dick Donner said at the beginning—"If Superman didn't fly there was no point in doing the film, because the flying sequences are the *key* special effects shots in the film." It's no good having Superman look as if he's lying in front of a revolving backing, anybody can do that. He's got to look as if he can really fly and *convince* everybody



Hydraulic rams push crystalline shapes up through the floor of the set while fragments of styrofoam and glitter are dropped on Jor-el (Marlon Brando) and Lara (Susannah York) from hidden dump tanks.

that he's flying. So yes, there were flying scenes shot on *Superman* which, when they were looked at the following day, were not as good as they looked when they were being shot. So Dick Donner would insist they were reshot, and I think that's the right way to do it. But there are lots of shots on every film that have to be redone, it's nothing unusual."

Though Meddings hadn't been involved in the shooting of any of the flying sequences I asked what he thought of the finished product: "I think they work very well. Fundamentally, of course, they weren't done any differently to the early days of Hollywood when they flew people—actors wore harnesses attached to wires, or they were stuck onto mechanical arms, if they could hide the arm from the camera. Really until you can come up with some sort of amazing magnetic field that enables people to fly you're limited to the traditional ways. If I could invent something like that I could make a fortune. But flying anything, models or whatever, is *always* a problem in any film. From what I can gather John Dykstra in *Star Wars* did his flying sequences in a totally different way because the models stood still and the camera did all the movements, which does away with the problems of wires completely..."

Had Meddings found working on such a vast picture as *Superman* very different from more conventional types of movies in terms of the available money, resources etc? "No, not really. The same problems exist on every picture no matter how big the budget—you've got a production office that's chasing you because you're spending too much money and you're chasing them because you need more money to do the shot the way the director wants it. In the end, on almost any picture, if they have

faith in you they will let you go ahead and do it properly because in the long run they know it's got to be good on the screen. The producers don't want to have to go on tour with the film explaining why it was a lousy shot."

And he was satisfied with all his work in *Superman*? "Yes, very. But really, when you do a shot and you *know* it's good then you know most other people are going to agree because one is very critical of one's own work. It's a bit like being an artist—the picture in your mind is never the one you get on the canvas, or in my case the screen. It doesn't matter how good it is, when you see it on the screen you say to yourself, I wish I'd done something else, or I wish I'd done it a different way. But then the director and the producers are thrilled to bits with what you've done then you forget the picture you had in your mind..."

Roy Field —optical effects

The third *Superman* effects expert I spoke to, Roy Field, was responsible for a totally different area of special effects—the opticals. Optical effects basically include all those types of visual effects that involve combining all the various image components, usually by means of an optical printer, onto one single piece of film. Like Colin Chilvers, Roy Field began his effects career with Les Bowie: "I joined Les back in 1954 when he was doing *The Quatermass Experiment* at Bray with his then partner Vic Margutti who was an optical effects expert. Then later Bowie's company broke up and I went to the Rank organisation for 17 years, then Les and I joined up again on *Superman*. When I was with Rank I worked on the first 6 or 7 James Bond films with

John Stears, who's a great friend of mine, then I went freelance in the early 1970s..."

I asked if he had decided to specialise in optical work at the very beginning of his effects career: "Yes. I started off on the camera side but in optical work. In other words, making a dupe (duplicate) negative which I think is the basis of all optical work. But I don't call myself an optical man—I call myself a cinematographer really because in my position one has to know exactly what a camera does and be able to converse with a cameraman of quite high standing and understand exactly what he's doing. So you've got to know both sides of the fence—all the optical side and all the camera side. That's why I was lucky when I went to Rank because I was trained by George Ashworth, who was head of Rank's camera department at Pinewood for many years and a very great man, and by Vic Margutti. So I had an all-round training."

When did he get involved with *Superman* and did he realize at the time it was going to become such a huge undertaking? "I got involved at the very beginning, in April 1976, when the project was first being set up. Colin Chilvers was already on the picture by a few weeks and so was Les Bowie. That was 2½ years ago... and, of course, when one read the first script, the original script, one knew it was going to be a pretty momentous task and that if they stuck to that script it was going to be the equivalent of making quite a number of normal pictures tied together."

And are there any major differences between the original script and the finished *Superman* film? "The original story-line didn't change much," said Field, "but obviously the conception changed with the change of directors. Guy Hamilton obviously had a different approach to the picture and when Guy left the new director, Richard Donner, brought in a script consultant called Tom Mankiewicz (co-writer of the Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever*) and so the conception changed but it was still a momentous task whichever way you looked at it. But basically it became more *realistic* in approach and in a way more difficult from the special effects point of view."

"I supervised all the optical work which covered a tremendous area and I was involved with nearly everything that went on. We used many of the old effects systems because I always try to have a back-up system in case one system doesn't work, or doesn't look as if it's going to work. This was important on *Superman* because a lot of the things had never been done before and we were never sure about how they were going to work out—so if one system should prove, for whatever reason, not acceptable to Dick I would have a back-up system prepared to make sure it *would* work. Of course, when you're shooting the different components of a scene many months apart, as we were often doing on *Superman*,



An example of Zoran Perisic's front projection process in action as *Superman* (Christopher Reeve) flies over the Metropolis skyline.

one is never sure until you've got all the components together that it will work . . . and the other big problem is getting as high a quality as possible."

I asked how closely he had to collaborate with the other effects men on the picture, such as Derek Meddings and his team of model technicians: "Well, if it was a straight-forward model shot that didn't involve anything else then obviously one wouldn't interfere. But if it was a shot that I had to do something with optically, like place into another scene, then we would have to collaborate quite closely. The great thing about this picture is that Dick Donner insisted on story-boarding every sequence which was tremendous help to everyone though we didn't stick rigidly to it. With a lot of the really difficult sequences Dick held meetings where we went through a preliminary story-board that the art director had laid out and, with the help of a sketch artist, we revised them according to our discussions. If Dick wasn't happy with the way the story-board had been laid out or if a sequence was technically impossible from the effects point of view then we would alter it until we found a way of making it work. So at a very early stage good story-boards that were practical to film were developed . . . it's no good having a story-board of a sequence that you just can't put onto a piece of film."

As an example, I asked how the sequence where the starship carrying the baby Superman approaches the Earth would have been handled by the various effects departments: "Well, in that sequence there were probably four different components—the moon, the Earth, the starry background and the spaceship itself. First the art department and the model people would build the various pieces and they'd be shot separately . . . then it would be necessary to combine them all together optically, which is where I come in. Sometimes, of course, it's possible to film two of the components together at once on the studio floor. Normally I wouldn't be present during the actual shooting—I would be called in beforehand



This scene occurs immediately after we have just seen Superman fly away from Lois Lane's apartment—with no cut between Superman's departure and Clark Kent's arrival. A brilliant effect using the split-screen technique.

to discuss it, or if something looked as if it wasn't going to work out as planned then I'd be called in to help devise another way of doing it. Often you've got to work out a lot of revisions on the floor because it's not until then that you actually find out whether something will work physically."

Naturally Field was involved with the flying sequences and he discussed the different processes that were used to get Superman into the 'air'. "A high percentage of the flying scenes were done with front projection. There were other ways it was done—with travelling mattes and small models of Superman—but basically it was front projection which meant that Christopher Reeve himself was involved in most of the shots. We found that he 'flew' in a certain way that was difficult to copy and when we tried other people they didn't look right. He was jolly good actually because he suffered an awful lot. He spent many hours at a time in uncomfortable positions but he never complained . . . you couldn't ask for more out of an artist than he gave us . . ."

Front projection, as I understand it, is achieved by projecting an image onto a screen covered with a special reflective material that bounces the light back in straight lines towards its source. Therefore to photograph the resulting image the camera would have to be in the same position as the light source, a seemingly impossible trick but one which is managed by reflecting the projected image off a half-mirrored sheet of glass behind which is positioned the camera. In other words, the camera is pointed directly at the screen while the projector is positioned at right angles to the screen. The image from the projector bounces off the mirrored area of the glass, which is placed at a 45 degree angle to the screen, hits the screen then

travels back towards the glass but this time passes through the unmirrored area to enter the camera behind it. The obvious problem with front projection is that if you want to move the camera you've got to move both the projector and the glass simultaneously which naturally makes it very restrictive. I asked Field if these restrictions still applied to front projection or whether a new technique for creating the effect had been developed. "No, the general basis for all front projection remains as you described it. Various improvements have been made but you are still very limited when using front projection. When you want to move the camera you have to have a very mobile and complicated rig to move all the accompanying equipment which is very heavy. You're also limited by the size of the screen available and also the size of the picture you can project—after a certain size the quality of the image degrades too much. That means in the case of *Superman* there was a limit to the size we could reduce Chris to in relation to the background whereas with the travelling matte there's no such limit—as long as the blue-backing covers the area all around the artist you can put him into any background you want and reduce him to any size you want in relation to it."

Before going on to discuss the pros and cons of the travelling matte system I asked whether he didn't think that front projection gave more realistic results than, say, rear projection (rear projection is achieved with a projector behind the background screen but this means that the background image appears 'washed out' in comparison with the foreground image, whereas with front projection, because more light is bounced into the camera, the background and foreground images are of the same



"Nobody else 'flew' as well as Christopher Reeve. They just didn't look 'right'"—Derek Meddings.



Superman (Christopher Reeve) flies with the aid of a front projection screen.

intensity). "Yes," said Field, "the quality is obviously better with front projection than rear but we don't use rear projection much anymore. There are certain things you *have* to do with rear projection but it's very limited and only a small amount of it was used on *Superman*..."

I asked if front projection was at its best producing *still* backgrounds. "No," said Field, "I would say that *fast-moving* backgrounds are the easiest things to do with front projection. They work very well—it's the static scenes where people have time to look and examine the backgrounds that you have problems." This answer surprised me as I had in mind the remarkable front projection scenes at the beginning of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* which created the illusion that the ape men were surrounded by a prehistoric desert landscape. Field agreed that these scenes were impressive but explained: "... Kubrick was using 10 x 8in front projection plates and that's another sort of system completely. Obviously you can only use plates that large on static shots but there are so few such shots in *Superman* it wasn't worth us setting up that sort of system as well. *Superman* had to be a *fast-moving* picture... to make the action flow Dick wanted the whole thing to move all the time, which meant that *everything* had to move, the camera and everything. And this is another big drawback to front projection—speed—because if you want to move front projection fast you're limited by how fast you can move the rig and the actual lenses themselves. The system we used on *Superman* was extremely good in its way—it was designed by Zoran Perisic who had developed a series of zoom lenses which allowed us to zoom in on both Superman and the background at the same time, thus keeping him in relation to the background. Of course, yet another problem with moving front projection is that you need a large blank area of screen to move the background image *into* and

as I said before, there's a limit to just how big you can make a front projection screen. Once again it's a problem you don't have with a travelling matte..."

At this point I should explain that a travelling matte is an 'automatic' matting process (a matte is anything that is used to mask off an area of a shot to enable another image component to be added later). The most common form of travelling matte is the 'blue screen system' which involves photographing the actor, model spaceship or whatever, in front of an illuminated blue screen. The colour negative is then printed onto a black and white film which only records the blue areas of the shot and after a further complicated series of printings the final result is a piece of film in which the background is *clear* and the foreground action is *opaque*. This is the actual travelling matte which is later used in an optical printer to mask off the foreground action when the background footage is being printed onto the 'dupe' negative. The process is then reversed with the creation of a counter-matte in which the *background* area is opaque and the foreground clear and this in turn is used to mask off the background in the optical printer when the original colour footage of the foreground action is printed onto the same dupe negative. The dupe negative should then contain both image components, such as actor and background scenery, neatly fitted together (without the mattes, of course, the result would be a double exposure with one image showing through the other) but unfortunately this isn't always the case. Often a thin blue line, or fringe, is visible around the actor (which is light from the blue screen being reflected off him) or you get a slight jiggling movement between the foreground and the background (caused by the registration holes in the different pieces of original film not being in *exactly* the same position).

I asked Field why, despite these drawbacks, it had been necessary to use travel-

ling mattes in *Superman* "Very early on I decided that we would have to have a blue screen system available though no one ever wants to shoot much travelling matte in a picture because of the time it takes and the various problems involved I wanted it mainly as a back-up system but we ended up using more travelling mattes than I expected. But with the highly complicated shots of Supey flying long distances and receding to a very minute size that was the only way they could be done. Travelling matte has certainly been vastly improved even from a few years ago and it's improving all the time but you always have problems with the system and always will... you still get lines around the actor but we know how to lose them..."

An obvious question was how it is possible to use a blue screen when shooting Superman in his blue suit? Why don't the blue areas of his uniform end up having background scenery matted into them? "Because actually his costume *isn't* blue in the film," said Field. "It's really nearer to turquoise than blue though it *looks* blue on the screen. You must have some green in it to make a matte using the blue screen system. At the beginning I had to test all the various blues for the Superman costumes that the designer, Yvonne Blake, could find for us and eventually we brought it down to about two, both of which were more turquoise than blue. Then we had to get DC Comics to agree to the colour..."

To be honest, I personally found some of the travelling matte shots of Superman flying to be among the least convincing effects in *Superman*. It seems to me that no matter how technically accomplished a travelling matte shot may be, there's always something about it that doesn't look right—an impression that the foreground is not really a *part* of the background, even if you can't see the give-away blue line. The longshots of Superman hurtling into the distance or circling a skyscraper as he does near the end of the film certainly looked spectacular but at the same time they looked almost like cartoon animation rather than shots of a live actor. I'm not sure but I think it has something to do with perspective—the background perspective changes while Superman's remains the same no matter how far into the distance he recedes.

As Field said above, most film makers try to avoid using the blue screen system. Stanley Kubrick, for instance, didn't use any blue screen work at all in *2001* despite all the complicated effects sequences in the film (whereas most of the model shots in *Star Wars* utilised the blue screen system and the resulting difference in quality is sometimes quite obvious). Derek Meddings is someone else who isn't keen on using the system: "On *Moonraker* we're doing certain shots that involve front projection or rear projection but we're *not* using blue screen. I'm trying not to use it even if it

means we have to cut a shot or work it out in a different way simply because we don't have the time to put it into an optical house and wait for it to come back. With rear or front projection you can see immediately whether a shot works but with travelling mattes you have to wait until the lab has combined the two films.

"In *Superman* they did blue screens and had the same problems as everyone else. Some of the shots are good and some of them not so good—and in the end, of course, sometimes a shot that is bad will end up in a picture because you haven't the time to do an alternative shot, so I'm trying to avoid that if I can."

On the subject of reshooting effects I put the inevitable question to Roy Field. "I wouldn't say that anything in particular on *Superman* was reshot," he replied. "Things may not have worked out as expected in some cases and we had to revise and retake but I don't think any more than normal. On any picture stuff is reshot. Dick Donner has very high standards as far as quality is concerned—which I agree with—so sometimes if the quality wasn't up to his standards then we'd redo them. But don't take any notice of all those stories in the press about the wires being visible. Those sort of statements are made because no one really knows the truth unless they're fully involved with it."

But the flying was the big problem?

"One of the main problems, yes, obviously. It was making a human do something realistically that is humanly impossible. A flying man just doesn't look right for a start unless it's done in a certain way. So it's a very difficult area not only technically but also artistically, and I think the way Dick handled those sequences was very good..."

Presumably Donner was very involved with all aspects of the special effects? "Yes, Dick was very involved with everything throughout the picture which was great because you always had someone to talk to who understood what you were talking about. He had a very difficult task

because there were so many things going on at once and it wasn't easy to keep track of them all, but he managed. He was a tremendous asset because he's so enthusiastic. Just when you're feeling depressed because something is not working as you'd expected he'd come in with this marvellous enthusiasm and cheer us all up. Then we'd take a fresh look at the problem and it would all start to jell. Not all directors are like this and I think that sort of attitude from a director is very important in special effects work because no matter how hard you try you can still spend hours wrestling with a problem that you didn't expect and you get so depressed about it..."

I asked what particular effects, apart from the flying, caused such problems on *Superman*. "Well, there were quite a number of things actually where we spent too much time and looking back one wonders why one did—one example is the Krypton sun that collides with the planet and blows it up. Getting that red, boiling inferno effect was difficult and we spent a lot of time on it. Finally it was done, first with a model and then had other components optically added..."

Were any new techniques for the optical work developed for *Superman*? "Yes, I would say there were but one is always developing new things in my line of work—you remember what you did on some picture years ago and you try to improve on it and develop it a stage further. Split-screen work is a good example. Split screens are much more sophisticated today—you can move the join across the screen today whereas once you were limited to locked-off camera positions... and today you can also pan or zoom or tilt with a split screen which is something that directors love." (A brilliant use of split-screen in *Superman* is the sequence where we see Superman fly off Lois Lane's balcony and then see Clark Kent appear at her door... all in one continuous shot!)

I suggested that working on the effects for the second part of *Superman* would be rather easier seeing that most of the



"When working with Brando, every minute counted!"—Colin Chilvers.

problems had been solved but Field didn't agree. "We'll have a whole new set of problems on Part 2. Each new scene will present new challenges and the problem still remains of being able to give the director what he wants. That's what makes my job so interesting. I mean, we've solved the flying sequences in Part 1 but we want to improve on them, and I think there's a lot of room for improvement. We're not stopping at this point and saying 'that's it'—we're going to try and make Part 2 even better."

Was there much still to be shot on Part 2? "Oh yes, there's a lot of work to do. A percentage of the live action has been shot but we haven't tackled a lot of the more difficult work yet because of the pressures of completing Part 1. Originally we had intended to keep abreast of both pictures at the same time but we rapidly realised that that wouldn't be possible, so we shot things for Part 2 with the main actors and now we've got to pick it all up and make it work. We're starting now (January 1979) and first we've got to look at all the film we've shot and analyse what we did and how we thought of doing certain things and then we've really got to keep working until the producers decide they want to put the picture out, which will probably be in June, 1980. And I'm afraid we'll need all that time. The one thing about special effects is that it isn't fast. There is no short-cut to any effects shot—it's just a hard, long grind. Many producers complain at how long effects work takes but you're always having to do something that *can't* be done in reality and that's the difference..."

My thanks to Colin Chilvers, Derek Meddings and Roy Field for sparing the time to talk about their work and congratulations to both them and the other effects men who helped make *Superman* the marvellous film it is. Roll on June 1980.
—J. B.



Superman's Fortress of Solitude was built inside the huge 007 Stage at Pinewood Studios.

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STARBURST LETTERS

First of all I'd like to say how much I enjoyed Starburst 4. I'd also like to comment on future topics for consideration. Personally I thought the acting in *UFO and Space: 1999* was wooden and unconvincing. And *Space* was guilty of some terrible scientific 'cleverness', as well as some pretty awful scripts. For example, does any one remember the episode where the whole of the moon was destroyed—except that it was only a dream and our heroes are, in reality, safe? That sort of plot is an insult to the readers' intelligence and certainly fits within my definition of 'trashy television'.

However, I am not suggesting that such shows should not receive equal coverage in your magazine just because I personally don't like them. In fact, I must differ with Steven Oliver (letters page, Starburst 4) who requested that you omit certain programmes. If readers are interested, then programmes should be covered even if your editorial team aren't personally wild about them.

I do suggest that you cover *Dr Who* in some depth. As you probably know the 15th anniversary recently and yet it hardly receives a mention in sf media magazines.

Keep up the good work.

Pam Baddeley, Chingford, London.

By now, Pam, you will have seen the Terry Nation interview in Starburst 6, and more information on the earlier Doctor Who shows will be coming your way in future issues. How's that for service?

Starburst 4 is the best issue so far. Though I am a Marvel fan I felt the article on Marvel's movie comics was a bit drawn out.

Tolkien on *Rings* was a very good, interesting review. I hope the films of Ralph Bakshi will get to Britain sometime.

The *Starburst Interview*—Stirling Silliphant has some great ideas but what about the *Star Wars Interviews* promised?

War of the Worlds was definitely the highlight of the magazine. Perhaps, instead of the original poster for the film (which I found rather drab) you could have blown up a shot of the Martian spaceship.

Beeman on Marlin—totally boring. Why bother to write a review of something that isn't going to happen?

The *Starburst Reviews* were too long. If you shortened the book review section to a page by concentrating on books about sf films and art instead of fiction, and then scrapped the record section, you could have two more pages for comic strips. And talking of comic strips, *A Good Woman* was excellent.

The rest of the issue was fairly average. The letters page was too long. I disagreed with Peter Farman's letter which stated that *Slaughterhouse 5* was one of the best films ever made. This is utter rubbish, as is *Slaughterhouse 5*—boring, complicated and almost void of sf, save the last fifteen minutes.

Finally I would like to see more art from the likes of Boris Vallejo and Frank Frazetta.

Michael Slatter, Portsmouth, Hants.

When I first heard that Marvel were going to continue to produce *Starburst* on a monthly basis commencing with issue four I'll admit that I became concerned for its future. Marvel just didn't seem suited to producing a sensible, mature film magazine and what with *Superman* looming ahead... well, it just didn't look as though it would work.

Two months later *Starburst 4* appeared in Smith's. The cover looked good, very good—a much neater and more professional-looking cover than the previous three issues had been. The sight of the Hulk didn't surprise me but the format and overall appearance of the magazine did. It was brilliant—a much neater layout

than before (I'm talking about the contents now). The *War of the Worlds* poster alone justified the cover price but the smell of dried milk seemed to linger from page to page, cover to cover. I felt somewhat reassured and prepared to greet issue 5.

If it wasn't for the words 'A Marvel Monthly' in the top left-hand corner of *Starburst 5* who would have guessed that the magazine had been published by Marvel Comics. *Superman* seemed ready to see off anyone who opposed his position on the cover and it was a relief to see a quality pin-up on the back cover once more, after all I think everybody knows that they can 'now see the film at home'. To see the little-seen *Dark Star* film poster on the centre-spread was a rare treat as was the Doug Trumbull article.

Starburst 6 was again an improvement. Please don't ever cease printing the film-posters or the back-cover pin-ups, they make the magazine worth twice its cover-price. The only thing I find disappointing is the amount of space you give over to the new blockbusters like *CE3K* and *Superman*. It's far too much. There are scores of other magazines where one can find the information required. Behind-the-scenes and exclusive interviews perhaps, but not long reviews. I would prefer to see more space appointed to the earlier great sf films like *Day the Earth Stood Still*, *When Worlds Collide*: or what about *Lucas's THX 1138*. Do an article on the *Quatermass* tv series or the films. This is the stuff that makes your magazine so unique. Oh, and I hope you've got something planned for the *Planet of the Apes* films.

I'm glad to see that you've just about given up on the comic-strips—if this is what people want then there are plenty of comics for them to go out and buy. Finally, I was hoping that you would award a little more space to last autumn's Fantasy Film Convention as it was a rather special occasion for Britain. A full colour pictorial review... including photos of all the famous sf names who attended.—huh, you didn't even mention poor old Gerry Anderson.

Anyway, thanks for a magazine that Britain can be proud of.

Steve Blakemore, Southampton, Hants.

On the subject of older films, Steve, we think you will find that our ongoing SF Classics series will cover just about every great sf movie as it progresses. We will get to everybody's favourites eventually.

And as for the Fantasy Film Convention we would have included pictures of Gerry Anderson except for the fact that our photographer's camera became sick and a replacement could not be found in time. However, organisers Mike and Rose Conroy have come to the rescue with a photo of Mr. Anderson. By way of thanks, we will just mention that there is a second Fantasy Film Convention planned for later on this year and details appear elsewhere this issue.



Left to right: Mike Conroy, Gerry Anderson and Rose Skinn. Plus Eagle model in foreground.

Congratulations on your excellent magazine *Sterburst*, and I'm delighted to see that it is now to appear monthly.

On reading the letters page in No 4, I must agree with readers who complain about the total omission of any material on *Doctor Who* so far. This series has recently celebrated its fifteenth anniversary, and while no one pretends it is perfect, it has nevertheless produced some very good sf ideas over the years. It is light-years ahead of stuff like *Blake's 7*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *UFO* and *The Incredible Hulk*, and the current series is one of the most lively and inventive yet.

A few quizzical smiles must be raised by Steven Oliver's letter, which dismisses *Doctor Who* as "trashy" and in the next sentence heaps praise on *Space: 1999*. Everyone agrees that the special effects in *Space: 1999* were superb, but in all other respects the programme was an absolute disaster! The show's basic storyline was scientifically preposterous, as anyone with a little basic knowledge of astronomy and physics could explain. As for the individual stories, the first batch were humourless and full of meta-physical clefttrap, and the second series showed only marginal improvement. It's no surprise that the show has been scrapped. *Doctor Who*'s basic theme is so ingenious that it side-steps the problem of scientific plausibility altogether, and its characters do behave like people rather than zombies.

So let's have a little recognition in your pages for *Doctor Who*, which must have served as a tremendous breeding ground for the interest in the sf genre. The show will soon reach its 500th episode, so why not do a special feature in celebration of this remarkable series?

Stephen Bell, Bradford, W.Yorks.

I wouldn't have said that *Sterburst* 4 was the best issue yet as I preferred issues 2 and 3, but it's good to see you have gone monthly.

In the latest issue I enjoyed the features on *The Hulk*, *War of the Worlds* and *Marvel sf Comics*. I enjoy *Things to Come* and especially like the book and record reviews. I have heard a lot about *Battlestar Galactica* and *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* and I look forward to your coverage of them. I'd also like to see a special effects feature on *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

While I like comic strips I thought *A Good Woman* was nonsense. Bring back *Jeff Hawke*!
I look forward to future issues.

David Lewis, Edinburgh, Scotland

Sterburst 4 was very good. I just have to comment on the beautiful story entitled *A Good Woman*. Never in all my years of reading *Marvel Comics* have I enjoyed a comic strip so much. Steve Moore's script was excellent, but the art was even better. Chris Baker's style is something very rarely seen in British comics today. It showed that a great deal of love and care went into it. I hope to see the Moore/Baker team again soon.

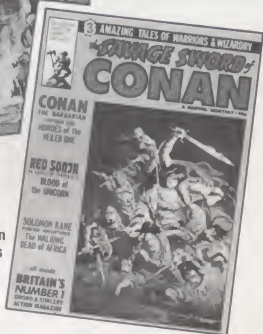
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INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

With a remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* just around the corner, *Starburst* magazine takes a look back to the mid-1950s and the original Don Siegel version of this landmark of the sf cinema.

Feature by Tise Vahmigi

You're next!" screams the blindly hysterical figure of Kevin McCarthy as he closes the most shudderingly effective science-fiction film to emerge from the 1950s. The film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, remains in the annals of sf cinema as one of the truly remarkable examples of high-tension story-telling.

The great tidal wave of science-fiction films, during the 1950s, washed into the cinemas with literally hundreds of Alien Invasion movies—from vampiric, vegetal figures to gelatinous blobs. Most, however, depended on some form of special effect, whether it was Michael Rennie's silver saucer in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or the fleet of Martian war machines in *The War of the Worlds*. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, fitting into the Alien Invasion theme, is in effect a comparatively restrained and modest piece of filmmaking.

The film opens with McCarthy, a perfect specimen of mental and physical wreckage, in a hospital trying desperately to convince a psychiatrist (played by Whit Bissell) of the

horrors taking place in the little town of Santa Mira. A second doctor (Richard Deacon) believes that McCarthy's warnings are merely the ravings of a crazed mind. Bissell is the more sympathetic of the two doctors and asks McCarthy to relate the story. At this point the film goes into flashback, and the bizarre story begins.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers was released in Superscope by Allied Artists on February 5, 1956.

When Dr. Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) returns to the little California town of Santa Mira from a short business trip, his nurse, Sally Withers (Jean Willes), informs him of a strange hysteria that apparently is spreading among the populace. Miles and his fiancée, Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter), with their friends Dr. Daniel Kaufman (Larry Gates), Jack and Theodora Belicec (King Donovan and Carolyn Jones), slowly realise what is happening. At first a few of the townspeople, and then more and more, have lost their emotional and spiritual identities, and appear as strangers to their relatives and friends, while retaining their

outward appearance. A determination, a passion merely to survive, is the only impulse that remains.

Miles and his friends soon find the unexplained and apparently unexplainable cause. A weird form of giant plant life has descended on Santa Mira, and has spread to nearby towns. When great pods ripen and open, from each of them emerges a "blank" in human form: a blank that, for example, becomes a second Jack Belicec, and, during the real Belicec's sleep, drains from him all of his normal emotions—all but the will to survive. This done, the blank turns to a ball of dust in the husk of its withered pod. In spite of all that Becky and Miles can do to escape this, Becky, during a sleep of utter exhaustion, becomes a pod person, and Miles alone is left, trying to warn the world of what is happening.

The story originated as a serialised tale in *Colliers* magazine, during 1954, under the title of *The Body Snatchers*. The following year, author Jack Finney expanded on the work, and the story was published as a hardbound novel. Jack Finney's work,



Miles Bennell and Becky Driscoll make an attempt to outrun the pod people and escape to warn an unsuspecting world.



Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) attacks two of the pod people with sedative-laden hypodermic syringes when they corner him in his surgery.

involving the invasion by parasitic aliens, had been preceded by some outstanding examples of the theme in sf literature, including Harl Vincent's 1935 novelette *Parasite* and Robert Heinlein's compelling story, *The Puppet Masters*, published in 1953. The latter story eventually formed the basis for the 1958 AIP release *The Brain Eaters*, which dealt with an army of mind-controlling parasitic slugs which attach themselves to the victim's neck.

Producer Walter Wanger read Finney's novel, saw the strong potential of an engaging and exciting sf movie (popular with the mid-Fifties' movie market), and took the book along with his idea to action/drama director Donald Siegel. Siegel was equally impressed with *The Body Snatchers*, and assigned Daniel Mainwaring to write the screenplay; many sources since that time have claimed that Sam Peckinpah wrote an uncredited part of the screenplay, but Siegel insists that Peckinpah was only his assistant at the time and though he may have made suggestions along the way he did not write any of the film. Peckinpah, incidentally, appears in the film as a meter reader.

Pre-production title of the film, and director Siegel's favourite, was *Sleep No More* . . . which probably would have been the case had Allied Artists not

tampered with the original Mainwaring/Siegel version.

On completion, Allied Artists decided that the film was too confusing for audiences—following a couple of bad receptions at pre-views—so they began making moves to bring in a new writer and director to put together an “explanatory” framing sequence. On hearing of this, Mainwaring insisted that he write the additional sequences and convinced Don Siegel to come back and do the filming.

Siegel has stated many times why he was most reluctant to add the framing sequences: “First of all, it lets you know right away something unusual is going on. If you start, as I wanted to, with McCarthy arriving in the town of Santa Mira, it reveals itself slowly, we understand why McCarthy can't readily accept the terrible thing that appears to be happening.”

The February 29, 1956, edition of *Variety* reviewed the film with borderline enthusiasm:



Dr Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) discovers something nasty in his cellar.

"Walter Wanger comes up with a tense, offbeat piece of science-fiction here that looks headed for stout box-office returns, particularly in view of the present market leanings in this field. Occasionally difficult to follow due to the strangeness of its scientific premise, action nevertheless is increasingly exciting as it builds to a strong climax. With its exploitation potential, film is suitable for either top or bottom spot of double bills."

Although a fitting part to any sf double-bill, the film was already saddled with the almost-anticlimactic framing sequence and the ever-recurring front-office wizardry of stamping on a heavy-handed, exploitation title.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers, in its original version, had at least some symmetrical form, a deliberate act on behalf of director Siegel: the picture begins with a little boy running out of town in terror because he has discovered that his mother is, strangely, *not* his mother, and ends with McCarthy fleeing down the same road from the pod people.

Outside of the thematic elements of Alien Invasion, world conquest and non-humanoid extra-terrestrials, the strongest—and subsequently the most effective—form of terror implied in this film is the loss of human identification. The individuality of man, his emotions, personal knowledge, experience, and human strengths and weaknesses are the most valuable assets in his makeup as a person—once these are lost (or stolen, as in this case) the person literally becomes a pod, a characterless blank.

Director Don Siegel tends to see this flimsily veiled message as something of a personal statement regarding society: "Pods. Not those that come from outer space, vegetables from outer space. People are pods. Many of my associates are certainly pods. They have no feelings. They exist, breathe, sleep. To be a pod means that you have no passion, no anger, the spark has left you."

Very much a part of the beauty of this film is that it draws on the old spider's web formula—the narrative, enhanced

by the visuals, draws the viewer into the plot which becomes more and more threatening in its normalcy. Seen from an individual's point of view, which tumbles slowly into a claustrophobic view, the confines of the Santa Mira community become alarming to the point of total paranoia—the passage of near-subjective narrative is not unlike Richard-Matheson's case with Robert Neville, in his classic novel *I Am Legend* (filmed in 1964 as *Last Man on Earth* and remade as *Omega Man*).

At first, in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, there is the little boy who believes his mother is not his mother, then there is Becky's Uncle Ira, who has somehow changed—he is Uncle Ira, yet there is no spark of emotion or familiar warmth that belongs to Uncle Ira. Eventually, as the town is taken over by the aliens, McCarthy realises that his nurse has been taken over too, along with the switchboard operator and the police. All the components of sanity and safety have been possessed by the ever-expanding alien influence... the pods from outer space.

A low-level, though equally interesting, account of this can be seen in Jack Arnold's 1953 chiller *It Came from Outer Space*, where hero Richard Carlson seems to be the only character in the story who realises that alien intruders are taking over the identity of his fellow earthmen. However, whereas in *It Came from Outer Space* the apparent alien threat is eventually curbed and resolved, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has no such wrap-up resolution, most definitely not in the original version of the film and only very lightly in the afterthought framing epilogue; Whit Bissell's eventual phone-call to the FBI does not automatically assure safety from the bizarre invasion.

Finney's 1955 novel began: "I warn you that what you're starting to read is full of loose ends and unanswered questions. It will not be neatly tied up at the end, everything resolved and satisfactorily explained. Not by me it won't, anyway."

The printed story was written in the first person, with Bennell relating the strange sequence of events direct. The Siegel film only begins, in the flashback, with a short narration by Bennell, then dumps the viewer right in the middle of the weird situation with him. The book, obviously, absorbs the reader and maintains a suspenseful pace, but the film cannot cater for time and space letups... *you* are literally there.

There are, however, two sequences from Finney's story that the film did not include: none of the major characters in the book are taken over by the pods, whereas in the filmed version only Bennell survives the duplication; and the part that was not filmed due to budgetary restrictions was, as the book relates, the final departure of the pods—"... a great awesome swarm of



The poster for the new version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* contains echoes of the original (see page 24).



Horror in the greenhouse. Belicec (King Donovan) and Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) advance warily towards a pod as Becky (Dana Wynter) and Theodora (Carolyn Jones) recoil in fear.

dark, circular blobs drifted, ascending slowly and steadily into the sky."

The screenplay improved on, rather than disturbed, the original book version by drawing in (dehumanising, if you like) the very people that the viewer—and Bennell—not only depended on as a last outpost of sanity but also were familiar with. When Becky finally succumbs to sleep and Bennell realises that the duplication has taken place, this, for him and us, is the ultimate horror. The scene is made even more chilling in that the realisation hits him during an embrace with Becky.

The departure of the pods in *The Body Snatchers*, thousands floating skyward in an eerie ascent, is indeed a remarkable moment. However, that is where the printed page can succeed over the film-maker—especially if the film-maker is Allied Artists, and cannot cater for the high-budget special-effects required to make the scene visually exciting, and equally convincing.

One wonderful element of magic in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is that the time and setting belong to one of the more paranoid and hysterical periods in America's history. The 1950s were rife with political propaganda, internal insecurity, and scientific discoveries in areas of destruction. With anxieties mounting in all

these departments, audiences attending *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* during the time of the film's release would be far more susceptible to the film's basic premise—alien intruders mysteriously appearing in the midst of a quiet community and turning the inhabitants into mindless zombies.

Considering the social and political climate at the time of the Siegel film, it will be interesting to see just how the remake fares.

However, remakes rarely stand up for comparison with the originals, and it seems unlikely that the W. D. Richter-scripted Phillip Kaufman-directed re-run will shake the foundations of Don Siegel's masterpiece, despite boasting a cast of such folk as Leonard Nimoy, Donald Sutherland and Brooke Adams.

It would be appropriate to let Siegel (from an interview for the French film magazine *Positif*) have the final word on his, the original, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: "This film has an extraordinary effect on the public, it was discussed in clubs. Letters, articles were sent to me to back up our thesis. Everyone believed in it, including my star Dana Wynter, who, when I put an enormous pod under her bed, almost died of a heart attack."

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)

Kevin McCarthy (as Dr Miles Bennell), Dana Wynter (Becky Driscoll), Carolyn Jones (Theodora Belicec), King Donovan (Jack Belicec), Larry Gates (Dr. Daniel Kaufman), Ralph Dumke (Nick, the Sheriff), Jean Willes (Sally), Virginia Christine (Wilma), Tom Fadden (Uncle Ira), Kenneth Patterson (Mr Driscoll) Guy Way (Sam), Eileen Stevens (Mrs Grimaldi), Beatrice Maude (Grandmother Grimaldi), Jean Andren (Aunt Elveda), Bobby Clark (Jimmy Grimaldi), Everett Glass (Dr Ed Pursey), Dabbs Greer (Mac, the gas station attendant), Pat O'Malley (Baggage Man), Guy Rennie (Proprietor), Marie Selland (Martha), Sam Peckinpah (the meter reader); uncredited, Whit Bissel (Dr Hill), Richard Deacon (Dr Bassett).
Produced by Walter Wanger, Directed by Donald Siegel, Screenplay by Daniel Mainwaring based on the novel *The Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney, Photography by Ellsworth Fredericks, Production Design by Edward Haworth, Music Composed and Conducted by Carmen Dragon, Special Effects by Milt Rice, Edited by Robert S. Eisen, Set Decorator: Joseph Kish, Makeup by Emile LaVigne, Released by Allied Artists, Filmed in Superscope, A Walter Wanger Production.
Time: 80 mins.

WALTER WANGER CREATES THE ULTIMATE IN SCIENCE-FICTION!

INVASION OF THE

BODY SNATCHERS



DO



COLLIER'S MAGAZINE
called it
"THE NIGHTMARE THAT
THREATENS THE WORLD"

AN
ALLIED ARTISTS
PICTURE

starring
KEVIN MCCARTHY • DANA WYNTER

with LARRY GATES • KING DONOVAN • CAROLYN JONES • JEAN WILLES • RALPH DUMKE
Directed by DON SIEGEL • Screenplay by DANIEL MAINWARING • Based on the COLLIER'S MAGAZINE Serial by JACK FINNEY

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MECHANICAL MEN of the Movies

From *Metropolis* through *Forbidden Planet* to *Star Wars* robots have lumbered across both cinema and tv screens in droves. Starburst looks at some of the best (and some of the worst) robots since 1926.



Dr. Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) demonstrates Robbie the Robot's inability to harm a human being by ordering him to fire a blaster at Commander Adams (Leslie Nielsen). *Forbidden Planet* (1956).

The movies have a long track record of consistent change, adaptation, and alteration when it comes to using written works as a basis for screen treatment. Science-Fiction material, in particular, and—in this case—the literature of the automation or robot. There exists a tremendous chasm between the written sci-fi following and the filmed sci-fi faction. Since Czech writer Karel Capek's play 'R.U.R.' (Rossum's Universal Robots), the movies have adapted and formed their own version of the robot—sometimes exciting, often ludicrous.

One of the most famous robot figures in the history of genre cinema is Rotwang's bizarre creation in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926). The film was a masterpiece of special effects in its day—though its power is such

that it manages to fascinate even today's well-worn viewer—and introduced an automaton that eventually became a powerful guideline for most future robot characters. Compare, for instance, the initial design of the robot in *Metropolis* against the See-Threepio character in *Star Wars*.

The story in *Metropolis* (from the novel by Thea von Harbou) concerns a city in the distant future which is split into two factions; the skyscraper maze of the wealthy and the gloomy underground dwellings of the workers. When a young girl, Maria, appears to be effecting a strong influence on the workers by way of protest, the master of *Metropolis* arranges for the scientist Rotwang to build a robot in her likeness which will be put amongst the workers to break down their ranks.

The electronic creation of the robot—with its switches, coils, lights, and profusion of wires—set down the foundations for all Frankenstein-like laboratory sequences during the following three decades.

The Serials—a whole separate division of Cinema—utilised, and went overboard with, the robot element during their days as matinee actioners. *The Vanishing Shadow* (1934), from Universal, saw a vengeful character using a wide array of technological devices to destroy an evil political group—including in his arsenal a (silly looking) robot. In 1935 Gene Autry was fighting Murania, a futuristic city existing some 20,000 feet under Autry's ranch—in *Phantom Empire* (1935). Needless to say, these Muranians are a highly advanced race and Autry is given a tough time, with death

rays and robots. *Undersea Kingdom*, in 1936, saw Crash Corrigan clashing with the evil forces of Atlantis, and was called upon to fight robots—called 'volkites' in the film. The basic design of these robots was used again in the serial-spoof *Flesh Gordon* (though somewhat adapted). Buster Crabbe as *Buck Rogers* (in 1939) was pitted against the villainous Killer Kane; here there were human-robots controlled by 'filament-ray helmets'. 1939 had *The Phantom Creeps* and crazed scientist Bela Lugosi attempting to destroy the world. Part of his ridiculous plan consisted of an 8-foot tall steel robot—the face of which looked like a kiddie horror-mask. More robots appeared in the 1940 *Mysterious Dr. Satan*, only they happened to be the same 'props' as were originally seen in *Undersea Kingdom*. *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1952) also used these robots in their proceedings. Further down to comic level was *The Monster and the Ape*, in which a professor's robot battles the villain's ape—which he calls 'Thor'. These robots throughout the Serials shuffled, clanked and stumbled about each serial-episode and were in line as much with Musicals as sci-fi literature.

'Klaatu Barada Nikto'—next to 'Keep watching the skies' (from *The Thing*)—is about the most famous line in the history of science-fiction cinema. The line comes from a highly dramatic sequence in the classic 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, directed with great subtlety and force by Robert Wise. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* tells of an alien 'ambassador' who journeys to Earth with a severe warning about armament control and world aggression.



Jessica (Jenny Agutter) and Logan (Michael York) come face to face with the robot, Box, in the 1976 MGM movie *Logan's Run*.

The alien visitor Klaatu (Michael Rennie) brings with him a giant robot—Gort. 'Klaatu Barada Nikto' is the order that must be given to Gort in the event of anything happening to Klaatu—otherwise the robot is likely to destroy the Earth as a form of retaliation.

Based on the story 'Farewell to the Master' by Harry Bates, the actual situation is that the robot is the master and in their own civilisation it is the robots who rule. In

Bates' book this is revealed in a 'twist' ending, but in the film version this was played down because the implications would be too complex.

At the beginning of the film Gort exercises his power when Klaatu is struck down by a nervous rifleman by vaporizing the army's tanks and guns with a destructive heat ray. The robot, later in the film, also vaporizes the wall of a jail in which Klaatu is kept. At one stage the military try drilling into the giant robot's metallic casing to test the strange metal, but the casing proves impregnable. In short, the robot is totally without weakness.

Art director Addison Hehr came up with the idea of a 'fluid metal' robot figure, with no joints or sections but a smooth metallic—almost elastic—appearance. The only feature Gort had was a 'closed-eye' visor spanning the face. When the art department had completed their 8-foot Gort costume it was Robert Wise who came up with the man to wear it—7ft 7in doorman of Grauman's Chinese Theatre, Lock Martin. The suit, made of foam-rubber and painted silver (the helmet was actually metal), built up such intense heat inside that Martin could only work for a few short hours at a time.

The heat ray seen coming from Gort's helmet was done by the special effects department who made a special helmet and later matted in the deadly ray effect.

The Day the Earth Stood Still is one of the rare sci-fi films to cast a robot character as one of its central characters yet manages to extract a restrained but effective performance from it. The playing down, somewhat, of this special effects marvel adds greater credit to the movie as a whole.

Robot Monster is a cheapie picture about an ape-like alien invader, Ro-Man, who



Kent (Eddie Cobb) watches the malevolent robot clutch at Gloria (Ada Ince) in the Universal serial *The Vanishing Shadow* (1934).



Doctor Zachary Smith (Jonathon Harris) and his mechanical friend from the episode "Island in the Sky" of the sf tv show *Lost in Space*.

kills everyone on Earth except 6 people. Young Johnny, a big fan of sci-fi comics and pulps, and his family are the survivors and eventually see Ro-Man destroyed by his master, the Supreme Ro-Man. Then Johnny wakes up to prove that it has all been a dream. Though originally made—in 1953—in 3-D, it was finally released "flat". The only curious element with this picture is trying to figure out how they (3-Dimensional Pictures) got Elmer Bernstein to supply the music...

Lee Sholem—who directed many of the *Superman* TV episodes—brought forth in 1954 a good-natured, emotional robot called *Tobor the Great*. Tobor was a strange collection of joints and hinges, built with the intention of being the first space-pilot to explore outer space without risking human life. From that point on the script (by Philip Macdonald and Richard Goldstone) takes up a spies and enemy agents story, with the scientist and his grandson being rescued by Tobor.

A girl awakes after taking a heavy dose of sleeping pills and finds the whole city deserted. Desperately, she searches to find someone, eventually meeting up with a man who had been robbed and knocked uncon-

scious during the night. Together they find that the city was evacuated during the night and when, along with another couple, they prepare to leave they are confronted by some enormous robots. This was the beginning of *Target Earth* (1954)—and turned out to be the only imaginative part in the whole movie. The robots are apparently controlled from Venus (mounted on the heads)—intend to conquer Earth. The scientists eventually create a counter-weapon which shatters the robots' glass cathode-tubes. The film ends with a scientist declaring that if the tubes had been made of metal instead of glass there would have been no way of stopping them. *Target Earth* is the sheerest juvenalia which falls completely to pieces after the beginning. The robots are the big, bulky box type which induce no visual terror at all—in fact, they are somewhat reminiscent of the cardboard kind that used to shuffle around in the serials. The story was based on 'Deadly City' by Ivar Jorgenson (aka Paul W. Fairman) and originally published in *If: Worlds of Science Fiction* (March, 1953).

Gog, from United Artists, concerns a subterranean laboratory where scientists are

constructing the first space station. The entire lab complex is under the control of a massive computer, Novac, which also controls and manipulates the robot Gog. This robot is a small tank-like machine with steel arms and pincers—and soon becomes a threat when Novac is sabotaged and Gog runs amok. The whole show—utilising the rogue-computer theme—is quite similar to the excellent *Colossus: The Forbin Project*. Photographed in lush Eastman Color and produced by Ivan Tors—producer of such TV fare as *Sea Hunt*, *Flipper* and assorted marine juvenalia.

Produced by the Danzigers, *Devil Girl from Mars* has Patricia Laffen as the title character come to Earth in search of men for breeding purposes. Along with her she brought a hulking robot to enforce her commands. Once again this particular robot is an extension of the breed used in the serials—looking too much like a stylised vending machine.

From MGM—just about Hollywood's most glossy studio—came *Forbidden Planet* in 1956. This picture introduced the most widely known robot in cinema history—Robbie the robot. *Forbidden Planet* was a marvellous science-fiction adventure involving a defunct alien civilisation and its wayward influence on the remnants of an old Earth outpost. The strange power is not unleashed until an Earth rescue ship arrives to pick up the inhabitants. Professor Morbius, survivor from the original party, has managed to construct a robot from information he has acquired from the alien records. This construction of technology he has named Robbie.

The exciting visuals in *Forbidden Planet* belong very much to the special effects team and the studio art department (not forgetting Joshua Meador on loan from Disney). The results of their combined ingenuity appeared as the astounding Krel laboratory, the landscape of Altair-4, and the rescue flying saucer. However, Robbie the robot was their greatest achievement. Robbie was so successful a creation that Metro basically built a film around him when they made *The Invisible Boy*, in 1957. This follow-up film was really a piece of juvenile extravaganza, relating the lightweight tale of an alien force which takes over control of Robbie and puts him to evil use. The human characters in this are very much secondary players; considering the expense that the studio went to in making the robot they were eager to get as much as they could out of their investment. Robbie was designed by Arnold Gillespie and Bob Kinoshita and constructed around the Karel Cupek concept with the basic elements of Isaac Asimov's robotics laws. Adding a touch of polite superiority, Marvin Miller supplied Robbie's voice.

The special visual effects in *Earth Vs The Flying Saucers* were as pleasing and expert as anything else that Ray Harryhausen does—but the invading robots that emerged from the saucers were pretty

dreadful. Sadly—for this particular picture—the robots were of the tin-man variety. By this time (the mid-Fifties) the alien-invasion-of-Earth phase of films was in full swing—having already given us *War of the Worlds*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Killers from Space* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Among these films *Earth Vs The Flying Saucers* is one of the duller (excepting some of the fx), and the robot invaders are a forgettable bunch.

Using the same theme in general as *Earth Vs The Flying Saucers*, but proving to be a far more exciting picture. *The Mysterians* arrived in 1957. This was a Japanese version of Pal's *War of the Worlds*, pulling out all stops and settling down to a complete onslaught on a vast scale. One of the central invasion elements was a gigantic robot (looking something like a strange ant-eater) which emerged out of the side of a mountain and was virtually invincible. This character stomped Godzilla-like over the countryside emitting deadly rays and destroying everything in its path. *The Mysterians* is a pleasing film for allowing itself full use of a totally destructive robot being. In *Godzilla Vs Mechagodzilla* the Toho monster meets and battles a massive metallic creature called Mechagodzilla, a mechanical Godzilla look-alike who is under the control (again) of alien invaders. This 'cyborg' is eventually defeated in a colossal battle and Godzilla retires to his South Pacific home until the next city-crushing crisis.

Kronos is a giant accumulator—in the form of two cubes erected on a set of pile-driving pillars—sent from outer space to draw Earth's energy. The 1957 film, directed by Kurt Neumann (of *Rocketship XM*, *The Fly*, etc.), is a pretty dogged sci-fi picture—but the vast metal robot is an exciting and unique display of special effects.



Left to right: The robot Gorr (played by Lock Martin), Patricia Neal and Klaatu (Michael Rennie) from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).

Half of the special effects team on *Kronos*, Irving Block (in *'Fantascene'* Vol. 1 No. 2), explains:

'In *Kronos* there's another planet similar to our own, but perhaps on a higher industrial and technological state of development. They discover they're running out of energy, so what do they do? They can't send a wire, you know, so they send into outer space a machine that comes and sucks up all the energy and brings it back, like a parasite.

'I made the drawings of *Kronos*. I remember it distinctly and I know exactly why I did, how I did it. We had a beautiful

little model, a gorgeous model. I wanted it to be anthropomorphic, to look like a robot, but at the same time I wanted it to look like a piece of machinery. I spent a lot of time on it, it didn't just come like that! It was a long process of thinking. At one point it looked more like a construction by Picasso, but I reduced it down by a whole series of steps until it ultimately became just a black box...'

Jack Rabin, the other half of the effects team, also comments:

'When it became a box it was done through a series of dissolves—we never had a totally collapsible model. What we couldn't do with either model (*they had a 6-inch model and a larger one*) was done by animation. When *Kronos* is disintegrating in the end we put a sheet of glass in a door frame. Atop that we put aluminium powder. We heated it up so it started to melt, to run. Everything else, the lightning etc, was animation put on top of that. The powder wouldn't run fast enough so we really heated it up—we got pyrex glass to withstand the heat so that the stuff would crack and "do its thing".'

Kronos—apart from being one of the largest automatons to rampage across the screen—is quite a remarkable example of technology being completely indestructible and impervious to military might. It is only when the hero-scientists set up a chain-reaction and reverse the energy-extraction process does the monolith halt—and destroy itself.

Colossus of New York, directed by Eugene Lourie, was only interesting for John P. Fulton's special effects. The story of a benign robot turned bad is not new, and this film didn't reveal any imaginative



The Robotrix (Brigitte Helm) takes her first faltering steps in Fritz Lang's classic movie *Metropolis* (1926).



A glassy-eyed Dennis Price and a mechnical invader from outer space from film *Earth Dies Screaming*.

variations. The publicity for this film, with all its colour and action, is more exciting than the picture itself. However, despite a way-out, caped robot figure, *Colossus of New York* is somehow an interesting reflection of 1950s sci-fi screenplay treatment.

During the early 1960s Hammer director Terence Fisher made *The Earth Dies Screaming*—one of three sci-fi films for Planet. The story about a group of people menaced by robot invaders in a small deserted town was tedious and flat—illustrating just how much Fisher lacked interest in science-fiction. The robot figures marched aimlessly around the streets, and appeared to be as bored about the situation as everyone else.

The robotic figures of *Dr. Who and the Daleks* (1965) and *Daleks—Invasion Earth 2150 AD* (1966) spring from their popularity on the tube. Both films directed by Gordon Fleming, for Amicus, basically expand on the teleseries' Daleks mythos. However, the Daleks are not really robots because when originally introduced into the BBC-TV series they were partially shown to be small mutated creatures who only operate the

Dalek machines from inside, thus the Daleks are merely destructive little vehicles and not automatons.

Inoshiro Honda's 1967 *King Kong Escapes* features Kong and a robot duplicate of himself battling it out amongst Eiji Tsuburaya's special effects. The robot Kong looks as stupid as the guy in the monkey-suit, and the results are an insult to celluloid.

George Lucas' *THX 1138*, made in 1971 for Warner Bros, told of a futuristic world where people's emotions are minimal, numbers now replace names, heads are shaved bald and just about everything is coloured white. From this sterile and unfeeling society THX decides to run away. During his attempt to escape he is pursued by the police—blackleather clad, helmeted humanoid robots. These robots resemble contemporary American riot-police, excepting their expressionless metal faces. But maybe this is what Lucas wanted to convey. *THX 1138* is an excellent sci-fi film of a possible future, and the robot-police depicted may not be so futuristic after all.

Douglas Trumbull's charming *Silent Running*, released by Universal in 1972, had

astronaut Bruce Dern totally depend on his two 'drones' for companionship and to alleviate loneliness in deep space. His situation is that the last of Earth's flora is now contained in an orbiting greenhouse and when the order comes though to destroy it Dern rebels and sends the station out of orbit. Thus he ends up with two small boxlike robots (a third is destroyed along the way), which he names Huey and Dewey. He programmes them to participate as close to human company as possible; he teaches them how to play cards, how to plant a tree, how to take care of the greenhouse, how to play pool.

Trumbull, working from an idea created by Tod Browning's *Freaks*, recruited four children through Children's Hospital as drone operators. Trumbull described the workings (in '*Cinefantastique*', Summer '72):

'The drone bodies are made of a very lightweight plastic, but still they weigh 20 to 30 pounds. When an operator was actually working inside one, we removed the metal arm from the front—that arm alone weighs over five pounds—and replaced it with an artificial one made of the same lightweight plastic as the rest of the body. Still, it's difficult to carry around a 20 or 30 pound plastic suit, for anybody; so they didn't have much endurance. We worked that out with a two-wheeled dolly, the kind you'd use to move a refrigerator. It had an extended tongue on the front so that we could slide it under the drone outfit, tip it back and wheel them around the set, to conserve their strength. And the suits come apart—the louvered section of the front just pops right out, so between takes they could drink a Coke or something.'

Westworld (1973) and the sequel *Futureworld* (1976) centre on the world of dreams going haywire. The world in this case is a fantastic holiday resort for the wealthy called Delos; the dreams are robot technology malfunctioning with disastrous results. The first film, *Westworld*, was quite well done and slickly executed. The holiday resort of the Delos complex consists of three separate fantasy worlds: Roman world, Medieval world, and West world. All the inhabitants of these worlds are robots and all are programmed to 'play' along with the human visitors, enacting whatever the visitor wishes.

At this point it is appropriate to mention that the 'realism' is so effective in the movie that one tends to forget it is actors playing robots playing actors.

Needless to say, as all three worlds depict a particularly violent period of history, when the entire complex malfunctions the ensuing havoc is most bloody. The follow-up movie *Futureworld* deals partially with an investigation of what previously occurred but mainly goes off on a strange tangent dealing with 'cloning' and world-domination by androids. *Westworld* is a good—albeit restrained—piece of adverse technology science-fiction.

Logan's Run is the result of that happens when an exciting, fast-paced science-fiction novel undergoes eight script rewrites to become a movie. The result is a lot of expensive and glossy sets for the actors to wander around in; there is little meaning in the brilliant architecture and stunning structures. William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson's successful story told a thrilling tale of the world in the 22nd century, depicting such marvels as an underwater city, automated eagles, a robotic civil war battle, and Box, a robot that has a cruel artistic flair with ice and human flesh. Little of this magic comes out in the finished film version—the Box reduced to merely playing another stage of the not-too-exciting visuals. **Logan's Run** ably illustrates that the big movie machine corporations want to make an intelligent science-fiction film—but don't want it to come out looking like a science-fiction film.

Star Wars brings us pretty much up to date, being the most recent major film to give us robots, or 'droids', who are central to the movie's development as a story. The more prominent one of the duo is See-Threepio (C3PO) because he is allowed speech—though in a very English-butler tone and manner. This robot is played from inside by British actor Anthony Daniels, who lets the robot display a wide range of human emotions—although when things aren't going too safely during the story See-Threepio is given to a lot of whining and worry. The other robot is Artoo-Detoo (R2-D2), played by 3ft 8in tall Kenny Baker. This little 'droid' bleeps and



Michael Crichton's 1973 film *Westworld* portrayed a futuristic playground peopled by robots that malfunction and turn on their human masters.

whistles his way around and is really something like a pocket calculator in its calm efficiency. These two robots have more charm and character than any screen-robot ever seen; they also react beyond the science-fiction literature law or robotics, making decisions that not always conform to honesty and goodness.

During the drawing-board creation of the two robots, writer-director George Lucas examined previous robot characters in films and books—and disposed of most of the static laws and interpretations regarding robotic nature. The basic comparison is one of emotion—the viewer's emotion.

Forbidden Planet's Robbie, despite its childlike charm, doesn't evoke audience sympathy or feeling as such because Robbie is presented as an indestructible automaton more than capable of looking after itself in any situation. The 'droids' of **Star Wars** are entirely different—they need the audiences' concern. They are presented as vulnerable beings with human reactions, and as such are open to all forms of danger and destruction. The human cast of characters in **Star Wars** play in fear of being over-shadowed by the robots.

Who said robots would never replace man?



The most recent movie robots, C-3PO and R2-D2, brought mechanical men back to the screen with a vengeance in George Lucas' *Star Wars*.

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Galactic Surprise

When is a tv series not a tv series? When it's a film. Or to put it another way, when it's as expensive as *Battlestar Galactica*...

The fact is that *Galactica* has been seen in cinemas in Canada, certain parts of Europe, with a promised British release to come, is no vast surprise. Numerous are the American tv series and tv-movies which finished up as theatrical 'films'. *Galactica* remains an exception to every rule, however. For it has now been seen on American cinema screens as well.

Indeed, after a successful test run in Memphis, Phoenix and San Antonio, the 'film' is expected to win a national release throughout America in May. Just why, though, Americans want to pay for something they've already seen for free on home sets, is one for the psychologists.

Of course it could be argued that they're not not seeing exactly the same thing in cinemas. The 'film' is the pilot, or first episode of the series, *Saga of a Star World* they called it. On tv it lasted 148 minutes. In Canada, it ran 120 minutes in cinemas. In America, it's lasting 125 minutes on the bigger screen.

The paying customers get Sensurround for their ticket-money. (Big deal!) They also get 23 minutes less than the original (13 minutes, say US reports; presumably their calculators were on the blink). Then again, they don't even get the same 125 minutes culled from the original 148 minutes... if you see what I mean. The big switch between the tv episode and the Canadian 'film' and that released theatrically in the United States concerns the John Colicos character. His meanie is seen to be killed off in the newest movie version, while he lasted a full three episodes on the box.

Which version will Britain get? Presumably the latest American cinema version, since producer Glen Larson says the Canadian 'film' version has now been junked. But didn't Europe have the Canadian version? Ah yes, well... And Universal have replaced all those Euro-prints with the up-dated version? We doubt it. It's wait and see time.

The *Galactica* film opens in London's West End on April 12—to be followed by a second movie, pencilled in for July 29. Full national releases for both, of course, neatly setting us up for the start of the tv series on the ITV network in September—for seventeen weeks...

No Nic

Bad news for *Flash Gordon*. Nicolas Roeg has pulled out as director. His line producer Bernard Williams says it's because the much-delayed epic is now clashing with various of Roeg's other commitments. Executive producer Dino De Laurentiis is now looking around for a new helmer for the film which should have begun shooting in April 1978 and is only



Space: 1999 may have been relegated to a Sunday morning repeat slot on tv but the series looks as though it may gain a new lease of life in our cinemas. *Destination Moonbase Alpha* is in reality the two-part tv segment *The Bringers of Wonder* re-edited for theatrical release. Garry Anderson has been quoted as saying, "It may not be the ultimate *Space: 1999* movie, but it's a step in the right direction". Maybe!

just ready to begin around May 1979. The budget has been trimmed and scripter Michael Allin has been cutting his scenario to suit Dino's new cloth. And then again to suit Dino's new director? Time will tell.

Star Wars

Warning—whatever you do, don't call it *Star Wars 2*. Because it ain't. According to producer Gary Kurtz—and who should know better—the sequel is not a sequel but a separate entity featuring the same characters; much along the lines of how Coppola, Lucas' old boss, improved on the original *Godfather* with

the superb *Godfather II*, for instance. The new film is just one of George's dozen tales about Luke Skywalker and would be No 5 in sequential order, just as the first film would be No 4. Anyway, to make things easier on us all, George, Gary, Mark, Harrison, Carrie, Dave, little Kenny and giant Peter Mayhew (Chewie) are all calling the new film, *The Empire Strikes Back*. For now.

Friday Night Oracula

Travolta's *Saturday Night Fever* director, John Badham, is directing the movie of the *Dracula* play which Christopher Lee refused

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to play on Broadway (Starburst 5). Frank Langella repeats his Broadway triumph, with, as we should all know by now, Lord Laurence Olivier as Van Helsing. . . "is this a stake I see before me?" Donald Pleasence and the beautiful Kate Nelligan are also aboard. The Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderstone play has been scripted by W. D. Richter and opens for business, in America, on Friday, July 13 . . . so there!

Saturday Night Dracula?

Seventy-three and still going strong, John Carradine is up to his Count Dracula tricks even in *Nocturna*, as well as adding his lethal touches to Mexico's Bees. "Dad never stops."

agrees Keith Carradine. "He'll probably die in front of the camera." Perhaps that's exactly what young directors are hoping for. The good John's latest Dracula outing has him haunting the disco circuit (perhaps Badham should have directed) with the aid of Yvonne De Carlo as Jugulia and newcomer Nai Bonet in the title role—*Nocturna* being Dracula's granddaughter. "He'd rather die at sea, I think," adds Keith. "Yachting is his great love." Stand by for *Dracula Goes To Sea*. . .

Morse Code

Barry Morse is typecast. Again. He used to be every producer's favourite idea of a tenacious cop after all those years chasing *The Fugitive*.

Since *Space 1999*, he's stuck fast in a tv sf groove. Not, it appears, that he's been heard complaining at his bank. Barry co-stars in both the two big series of the moment—*Shape of Things to Come* in Canada . . . and *The Martian Chronicles* in Malta. At least the Ray Bradbury mini-series puts him in better company: Rock Hudson, *Holocaust's* Fritz Weaver, Darren (Kulchak) McGavin, Roddy (Planet of the Apes) McDowell, Maria Schell, Bernie Casey, Gayle Hunnicutt, Robert Beatty . . . and scripts by Richard Matheson.

Kubrick Shines

The gods are on Stanley Kubrick's side. When fire destroyed his sets for *The Shining* on Stage 3 at EMI/Electra Studios it looked as though filming would have to stop. The damage was estimated at almost \$2 million. But within a few days shooting resumed for the final couple of weeks' work on his ever-lasting production on Stages 4, 7 and 9. He was due to vacate Stage 3 anyway . . . as time was drawing close for George Lucas's *Empire* to strike back!

All this causes problems for the new Lucas-film which was due to begin filming in April. Producer Gary Kurtz has been quoted as saying, "a combination of Stage 3 being no more and the fact that Kubrick will be delayed on Stage 4 means that we will have to find 2 alternative stages. We'll start by using a stage at Lea International Studios at Wembley, which we had already held in reserve. We're having to look for stages at other studios. . . but we may be able to manage with the one stage at Lea. Although this is a problem for the new Star Wars movie, everything is covered by insurance policies."

Russie Triumph

Some of the exciting new Australian film-makers almost swept the board at the 11th Stiges fantasy/terror film festival in Spain. Colin Eggleston's ecological *Long Weekend* took *Best Film* and *Best Actor* for John Hargreaves; and Richard Franklin got the *Best Director* nod for his Carrie-like Patrick. American Camilla Keaton (no kin to Diane) was *Best Actress* for the nasty *Day of the Woman*; Italy took the script award for Mario Bava and Giuseppe Maccari's *Shock*; Czech cinematographer Jaroslav Kucera won a prize for *Adele Hasn't Slaved Yet*; and Dennis A. Chubby had the special effects title for *The Killer Bees* movie.

Loony sf I

Hollywood's current fad for sf comedy capers—like *Star Wars* joining up with *National Lampoon's Animal House*—has bred a new movie called *Americathon* which has America bankrupt in 1998 and a combined Arab-Israeli front trying to buy the country. The President

THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD

by Dez Skinn and John Bolton

ADAPTED FROM THE NEW MOTION PICTURE



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Soon to be appearing in your local newspapers—a new comic strip from Mervel Comics Editorial Director, Dez Skinn and top British fantasy artist, John Bolton. The strip adapts the Columbia movie *The Thief of Baghdad*. Watch out for it.

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decrees a 30-day telethon appeal to raise \$400-million and save the nation. The script comes from *Tunnelvision* scenarist Neil Israel; he's also directing. John Ritter, who has the Richard O'Sullivan role in the American tv version of *Man About The House*, plays the Prez. Shooting began with 1,500 extras jogging, pogo-sticking, skateboarding, roller-skating and cycling along the Grand Street overpass in Los Angeles. The only way to travel once America runs out of petrol and oil

and outlaws cars. Well, it makes a change from *Death Race 2000*.

Loony sf 2

And the American tube's love affair with whacky sf continues with a series called *Salvage One*. This has Andy Griffith as a junk dealer making the first privately-constructed moon rocket—from his piles of salvaged odds and ends. Well, at least they're honest about this one. It's made of pure rubbish.

High Finance I

With an overall budget of \$6,500,000, *The Changeling* is Canada's most expensive movie ever. It's an exorcism haunted-house number, topping George C. Scott and his wife, Trish Van Devere. The budget stipulates \$1,868,761—\$2-million at most—to be spent on star names. Scott, hardly a star name any more I would have thought, apparently gets a cool million himself; Mrs Scott, but don't ask me why, is rumoured to be on half-a-million... doesn't leave much scratch to entice a third star with. (They got old-stager Melvyn Douglas.) Yet the man whose job it is to make a winner of the film, British director Peter Medak (one of our better talents, though still to make his mark internationally) is paid \$123,824 only.

High Finance 2

Film figures like these are mandatorially available in Canada. Screen salaries are off the secret list there, by law... which could harm the sudden resurgence of Canadian cinema this year and its attempts to import Hollywood talent. Some of the other figures make intriguing reading. Lee Majors, for instance, is considered as much an economical asset as an established and great movie star like Robert Mitchum. They're making *Agency* together. Big Bob nets \$500,000 and Lee, who acts about as badly as his wife, rates \$425,000. They both have cuts of the profits, as well. No wonder Lee is staying on for another movie.

Canada Report

Meanwhile, other news from Canada... David Cronenberg's new one, *The Brood*, bought sight/script/cast unseen by London's Alpha Films, stars Oliver Reed and Samantha Eggar... Latest from the *Metal Messiah* folks, director Tibor Takas and producer Stephen Zoller has lately begun shooting: *The Tomorrow Man*.

Cronenberg's sounds a trifle more scary though. Take a gander at his publicity hype: "more frightening than the unknown is something you know you can't control. Inside some of us, it's hiding... screaming to get out. If it's ever unleashed, it will destroy everything that gets in its way. A unique experiment in inner terror. *The Brood* will take you beyond fear, beyond terror, beyond the boundaries of the mind... and will devastate you totally".

*Specially if you fail to buy a ticket.

Re-Think

Metamorphoses has been metamorphosed... In more ways than simply better voice-overs, as first announced by the Japanese Sanrio Distributors, following the almighty flop

NOW AVAILABLE IN CANADA
ENGLISH AND FRENCH VERSIONS
FOR THEATRICAL AND TV

THE LAST DINOSAUR

RICHARD BOONE THE LAST DINOSAUR
JOHN RANK • STEVEN NIGHTS • LUTHER ROCKLEY

ARTHUR RANKIN, JR. • JULES BASS
ALEX GRASSHOFF • TOM NOTANI

LE DERNIER DINOSAURE

RENAUD BASS PRODUCTIONS INC. 1989

Ad Art. If you've got it, flaunt it. Rankin/Bass Productions of New York have two language versions roaming the world of *The Last Dinosaur*, starring Richard Boone, but not, so we understand, in the title role. Obviously French-speaking filmmakers prefer more individual heroism, though. You'll notice there's only one character shooting at ole dino in the French ad while he has two people helping him in the English version. The French ad is better all the way. The dinosaur even has the girl in his hand, King Kong style, while uprooting the odd tree with the other. On the English ad, the girl sits alongside the riflemen and spear-chucker as if tenning herself on the grass.

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of this \$6-million animation fantasy. Walt deFaria has become the project's new producer-director. He's reconstructed the original—but totally. He's put the film's five sequences into a new order. He's dropped the music by the Rolling Stones, Joan Baez, *et al.*, in favour of (guess what?) a more disco feel—via music editor John Caper, of the *Saturday Night Fever* team. And, inevitably, Walt has axed the title of last year's massive flop in order to try to make it this year's big hit as . . . **Wondermaker**. Mmm!

Supersonic

The 47-member cast and crew of *Airport 79—The Concorde* finished locations at 6pm in Paris and were shooting in Washington next day at 7am. They'd simply flown Paris-Washington with a little help from their co-star—Concorde, of course. The new disaster-movie's stars feature *Airport* regular George Kennedy, along with Robert Wagner, Susan Blakely . . . and Alain Delon who finished his Washington scenes in time to catch the next Concorde back home at 1pm. By which time he was probably back in Paris before he'd left . . .

Hong Kong Clones

Cloning has struck poor Bruce Lee, the star who has "made" more films dead than alive. Shooting began in December for a quickie March opening in Hong Kong of *The Clones of Bruce Lee*. The stars . . . wait for it . . . are Bruce Li, Brue Le and Bruce Lei.

In Training

Dan Curtis is the latest film-maker to drop his fantasy credentials. His latest tv series notion is *The Super Train*, an hour of thrills and fun, all aboard a super de luxe (disco, sauna, bar) express from Los Angeles to New York (shot while standing in the MGM station). Could work, trains are in this year in the movies: *The First Great Train Robbery*, *The Avalanche Express*, *The Gold Train*, not to mention *The Lady Vanishes*.

Alien Planet

Putting the Star Wars/*Battlestar Galactica* legal tussle in the shade—the DC Comics injunction against a Florida publisher for

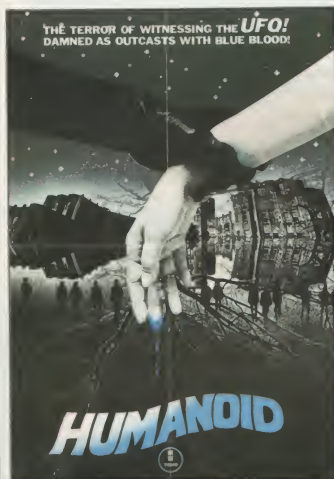
having a paper called . . . the Daily Planet. One really worries about those overpaid types in suits . . .

King of Horror

After movies like *Carrie* and *The Shining* (whatever happened to *Salem's Lot*?), Stephen King is about to terrify viewers. His book of three grisly horror tales set in a small Maine township has been made into a US-tv movie: *Nightshift*.

Durning Up

Brian De Palma's old New York mate and indeed discovery, Charles Durning (from *Hi, Mom* and *Sisters*) has been in just about every Hollywood movie over the last couple of years. Including De Palma's *The Fury*. He finally moves up-station from reliable character actor (*Dog Day Afternoon*, *The Choirboys*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Greek Tycoon*, etc) to top-billing in his latest, Fred Walton's *When A Stranger Calls*. This is a real terror-tale—"fear is the message" run the ads—and co-stars the bizarre Carol Kane and



Two films with the same title to create confusion at the box office. The poster on the left is for a Japanese film about UFOs and film of the poster on the right will star Richard Kiel as a very large robot, and is a Columbia release.

TO... COME.....THINGS..TO

Things That Have Already Come— Japanese Style!

Shiro Tsuruoka, Starburst reader in Tokyo, has sent us these fascinating posters. We thought you might like to see how movies are promoted over there. The *Star Wars* artwork being yet another different version of the original (with much better likenesses to the film's stars). *2001* uses the same artwork (but who knows what they're saying about it?). *Close Encounters* jumps from English to Japanese and back again in its copy. And the marvellous Japanese poster for *Space Cruiser*. Thanks, Shiro!



「スター・ウォーズ」のジョージ・ルーカス監督は「2001年宇宙の旅」について言う、スタンリー・キューブリックは熟考の57年間を費した、そして、どんな人でもこれ以上の傑作を創出することは不可能であると断言したであろう。貴族的に出資することは出来るが、2001年宇宙の旅は、どこかにも奪われて、と云う。

製作・監督スタンリー・キューブリック

2001年宇宙の旅

TO JAPAN ●
CROWN ●



..COME.....THINGS..TO..

Britishers Tony Beckley and Rachel Roberts. Needless to say, Charlie is making the film while appearing in another—**Starting Over** with Burt Reynolds.

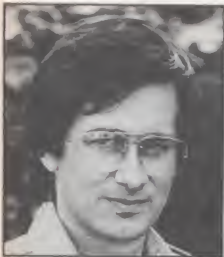
"That's Charlie for you," comments Brian De Palma. "He just can't stop working. He's been in everything since he went to Hollywood. But he's still exactly the same. A wonderful man to work with. I wanted him to be a cop in the car in **Tha Fury**. Then, Charlie read the script and wanted to play the psychiatrist who was Jewish—so we changed him to Irish! Charlie has to work all the time... he's always calling me up and saying, 'Have you anything for me to do?'"

CEQH

Forget the rumours. Now it's official. Columbia Pictures will re-release **Closa Encounters of the Third Kind** in America come the autumn. With, probably, some additional new footage... Steven Spielberg, it transpires, has been up to a few new tricks, and rather than commit himself to a total sequel just yet, he's making do with sending out the old box of tricks with a few new bricks. Stanley Kubrick never needed to do that.

1991

Meanwhile, Spielberg has finally begun shooting **1941**, his mad comedy about the great Los Angeles (mythical) air raid during World War II. His "littla" comedy has now grown to such immense proportions that both Columbia and Universal are making it. Christopher Lee is among the cast, alongside Japan's superstar



Director Steven Spielberg

Toshiro Mifune and Warren Oates. Other stars include Ned Beatty from **Network** and **Superman**, John Belushi from **National Lampoon's Animal House**, Lorraine Gary and Murray Hamilton from **Jaws**, Robert Stack, and cute Nancy Allen. De Palma's find as the awful Chris in **Carrie**, and used by Spielberg's current writers in their film of **I Wanna Hold**

Your Hand. The writers are Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale, from a story they dreamed up with the producer, John Milius.

"It's going to be a **Hellzapoppin** comedy," says Spielberg. "I've never done anything like it before. I might fall flat on my face like Peter Bogdanovich with **Nickelodeon**. It's a comedy about what happened in Los Angeles shortly after Pearl Harbour was bombed in 1941, when we all lost our minds, thought we were being invaded and spent every last bullet shooting at clouds for eight hours straight! People were hiding in basements they didn't have—they had to dig their basements first. It was much like the aftermath of the Orson Welles radio broadcast of **The War of the Worlds**—except it really happened in Los Angeles. I've taken this pillar of truth and shredded it into a movie that is visually mad-cap and quite nuts."

Helping him make it look nutty is the director of his and George Lucas' favourite Warner Brothers cartoon: **Duck Dodgers of the 24th Century**—Chuck Jones.

Stoker's Stars

EMI have announced plans to film **Bram Stoker's Jewel of the Seven Stars** in London and Egypt. Shootings begin in the spring—from a script by Clive Exton.

Quickies

Producer Edward Pressman must love Oliver Stone's **Conan** script. He's quickly bought another Stone scenario, **Baby Boy**—and is letting Stone direct it... Among **The Who's** movie plans for '79, beyond the release of **The Kids Are Alright** and **Quadrophenia**, is an sf movie "inspired" by their **Who's Next?** album... Canada enters the gothic horror genre with **Something's Rotten** from F. Harvey Frost... British Clive Donner directs Don Adams in **The Return of Maxwell Smart**, a rather late movie spin-off for the whacky old secret-agent tv series, which has as much to do with sf as Johnny Rotten does, but was loved by us all... **The Sentinel**, the author Jeffrey Konvitz is producing **Gorp**—gulp!... Recent double bill at a Newark cinema in America: **The Navy vs The Night Monsters** and **Woman of the Prehistoric Planet**. No comment!

Quick Sickie

George Romero's backers on **Zombie: Dawn of the Living Dead** have beaten the movie-world to the punch regarding the Jimmy Jones suicide cult with **Tha Guayana Massacra**. While other companies, notably Italian, were waiting to arrange deals with the flurry of quickie-sickie books about the Jones religion in the States (such as the San Francisco Chronicle staffmen's **The Suicide Cult** which another Rome mob began on January 2),

ZOMBIE

When there is no more room in Hell, the Dead will walk to Earth.



DARIO ARGENTO
presents a film written and directed by
GEORGE A. ROMERO
ZOMBIE
Executive producer
RICHARD P. RUBINSTEIN
Produced by
CLAUDIO ARGENTO
and ALFREDO CUOMO
Directed by
GEORGE A. ROMERO

Romero's **Zombie** partners, producers Claudio Argento and Alfred Cumono, in harness with Titanus, got their announcements in first, a few days after their movie started shooting. They've shut up like clams since. Total secrecy is the order of the day. ("Say anything to the Press, and we'll all commit suicide", said one member of the team.) More officially, a Titanus spokesperson in Rome declared: "You can be sure of one thing. We're doing a serious film on a big subject. We're not in it just for exploitation."

Doubt if even George Romero would believe that codswallop...

In this the third and final part of the interview, *Starburst* talks to special effects wizard Douglas Trumbull about his revolutionary new cinema process, as yet un-named.

DOUGLAS TRUMBULL

The Wizard of Special Effects

Interview by Tony Crawley

Starburst: You've mentioned it several times during the course of this interview—now can we hear all about your revolutionary new screen process, *Futurex*?

Trumbull: Well, first of all, don't call it *Futurex*. I hate the name. An executive of Paramount called it that once in the trade-papers, and it keeps getting repeated. It's a horrible name! I just call it a new film process—right now we're working on a name for it.

Whatever it's christened, you've claimed it will make today's kind of movies obsolete. How, what, why... and like that?

It's simply a 70mm film process that is being photographed and projected at 60 frames per second—rather than 24. Simply a different approach to higher quality.

Hardly simple, else it would have been invented before.

Ordinarily, everybody who's ever tried to improve the quality of film has tried to increase its physical size. I think the wall-sized I-max is a good example of an extremely large format—horizontally-pulled 70mm film; that's a 15 perforation wide image. I just felt that one of the things never been tried was higher frame rates. I had some suspicions that it might prove to be interesting. We did some tests, and sure enough, it is. Very interesting! It creates a greatly enhanced illusion of reality, over and above any kind of film you've ever seen...

So, it's 70mm film shot and projected at 60 frames per second. We use high-speed cameras, we've developed special, high-speed projectors. We have a new lamphouse that goes with the



projectors—new kinds of film transport mechanism. Enormously huge screens, much bigger than theatres have ever had before, accompanied by a sound system of just unbelievable power and quality again. And we've patented the whole system.

And it... er... works?

Oh yeah, I've been working with this for quite some time. We shot some demonstration film about three years ago and we've been testing it and fooling around with it since then, developing all the technical aspects. I've had a demonstration theatre at my office for some time, where we've been showing it. And it's really

impressive. It really becomes a subjective experience for the audience. Very much like a concert experience. You feel what you're seeing, what is occurring on the screen, is happening to you. Live... at that time. An unbelievably penetrating experience. When we tipped the camera over—people have just rolled out of their seats!

How big is your new screen?

Well, it's proportionate to the size of the audience. In its ideal circumstances, the screens will be anywhere from 60 to 150ft wide. So our smallest screens are about as big as the biggest Cinerama screens ever were. Huge, curved screens. Well, semi-curved—not as deeply as Cinerama was. I didn't think that was a very good design, in that the curvature of the Cinerama screen was curved at a point of about the fourth row. The rest of the theatre just had a lousy view. We've tried to make the curvature much more appropriate for the whole audience, by simply making the whole screen bigger. We're only restricted by the physical size of the theatre.

Will most cinemas be able to encompass this new screening?

No, very few can, in fact.

So, it's not just a case of new cameras, new projection equipment and new screens—but new theatres?

I think, in some cases, that's probably going to be true.

How is the movie industry going to take this expensive news?

I haven't the foggiest idea...! All I know is,



A stunning example of Trumbull's special effects technique. The half-completed space station whirls silently in orbit above the Earth, 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).



A group of scientists stand on the rim of the lunar excavation that has revealed the mysterious monolith. 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).

if we can demonstrate there is money to be made—anything can happen. I have hopes that it will.

Four years ago you were thinking the exact opposite. You all but quit movies.

Initially, we decided to text-exploit the process in amusement parks, staying away from the theatrical motion picture industry. We were actively pursuing that, pretty deep into that, when there was a change of management at Paramount. And a change of thinking. They decided they didn't feel comfortable with amusement parks—which is a whole industry unto itself. The management of Paramount felt their business was movies in theatres. They didn't want to diversify into a whole other area.

"When we tipped the camera over, people just rolled out of their seats."

backing themselves with a lot of new management expertise in that other business. So, they said: Listen, why don't we exploit this thing theatrically—there is more money to be made in theatrical exploitation of film which reaches more people in a shorter period of time.

Great news for you.

We said: Fine let's do that. We totally switched gears less than a year ago and have been fully researching theatres and theatre design all over the world. It's been a huge, research project to find out what theatres, in what cities, in what countries could conceivably house this kind of operation—how much will it cost and is it economically feasible to do it. Because as soon as we make a movie in the process, we've got to face having a place to show it. If you don't show the movie, you're going to go broke.

What had your research throw up about cinema quality around the world?

A lot of theatre design concepts hold pretty true. . . . They have a proscenium arch and are really old vaudeville (music-hall) houses; or if they are movie theatres, they were designed with long and narrow configuration, which doesn't lend itself to a wide peripheral view configuration.



After the murder attempt an astronaut Poole (Gary Lockwood) by the computer, Bowman (Keir Dullea) sets out in a one man pod to recover Poole's body. 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968).

So . . . new theatres!

There are a few theatres we found that are workable for the process, but not great. But, yes, in a lot of other cases, I think we are going to have to build new theatres. Or modify existing spaces. Such as the American trend toward giant shopping complexes that are essentially big, clear-spanned, open-space interior barns, divided up into stalls and into shops.

Or reverse the multi-cinema trend, perhaps?

Yes, that's been another trend in America and all over the world, where many full-scale theatres were divided into two or four smaller cinemas. Conversely, you can do the same thing in reverse—knock out a few walls and make one big cinema again. We feel that some

"Our smallest screens are about as big as the largest Cinerama screens ever were."

of these large, rectangular free-span spaces might lend themselves more to our process.

Wouldn't drive-ins be a better bet?

They'd have room for the screen. But as I say, the size of the screen is relative to the size of the audience. Drive-in screens are simply large because you're talking about huge car-parks. Enormous! Even if you had a 200ft screen in a drive-in, the actual field of view is very narrow. What we're trying to do is optimise it to where the horizontal field of view is at least in the area of 90 degrees. Filling your field of vision as much as possible.

How do you win the industry over to your way of thinking?

I've just finished shooting a brand-new ten-minute demonstration sequence, representative in a number of ways of some of the things we're trying to achieve in the process. . . .

If someone just took ordinary movies and made them in the process, it would be an increase in the quality but the movies wouldn't necessarily capitalise on the impact of the process. It wouldn't be economically feasible to do just that—you wouldn't be able to demonstrate at the box-office that there was enough difference. That has been the problem between

35 and 70mm and between optical and magnetic sound. There's never been enough of a difference to really justify a major investment into a major chance.

Until now.

Well, I hope it will. Maybe it won't. My new test sequence will first be shown to Paramount, for them to decide if they can really get behind it with backing, in terms of making a feature film. Then, it will be shown to exhibitors, for them to decide if they think it's worthwhile to convert their theatres for the process—or build new ones. Do they think more people will come in, should they charge a larger ticket-price, can they make it more of a concert experience with

"The film projects I'm working on right now for the process are very mind-boggling."

advance-booking, reserved seats, things like that? These are the questions that still have to be answered. They have not been answered yet. *Which leaves you in limbo, hopefully preparing a movie for the process, I take it.*

The biggest challenge for me—the reason I've been working on this process—is really something for myself as a film-maker. My mind is very much involved in creating experiences beyond the realm of physical reality and the film projects I'm working on right now for the process are very mind-boggling. Visual event movies which I find hard to describe to anybody. It's just my particular art-form.

Do your projects still include Hiero's Journey—which is set 26,000,000 years from now?

Yes, but *Hiero's Journey* has transformed itself as well. Partly to suit the process and partly because the story itself has evolved so dramatically that it's probably not even going to be called *Hiero's Journey* any longer. The Sterling Lanier novelisation was the



Jilliam Guiler (Melinda Dillon) clutches at her son Barry (Cary Gullely) as the occupants of the alien craft surround the house.

starting point for our idea, but it's changed so much and the movie has become so different from the book, that it'll have a different title and you just won't see any comparison. But yes, that project is being developed right now and maybe shot in the process.

But not Pyramid... set 500 years from now?
No, Not Pyramid.

What's the other project then—Brainstorm?

The title, I have found out recently, is owned by someone else. So again, it won't be the name

of my picture. The project I'm developing is about the realm of the human mind and what may go on in there.

Pity you've lost the title. I'm beginning to think that Brainstorm was also something of a sub-title for the process, the very experience we'd have watching the process on the screen.

Yes! The content of the film and the actual experience of the audience are very tightly interwoven. What happens is that the process is a very subjective experience for the audience. They are no longer watching other people react to one another in a story, *per se*. They are participants in it! Highly affected by it. And so the structure and design of the way the film is shot and conceived has to do with making the audience part of it.

But not participating to the point of changing the action—such as the tv shows in Fahrenheit 451? No, but it will change them (Laugh). No, they're not participating in that sense. I hope they won't think that the movie will take a turn that they didn't want it to take. People will, though, be highly affected by it—it's going to be a very involving thing.

"Hiero's Journey has transformed itself well to suit the process."

You'd hardly want to even crudely label what we will see—and hear—in the process, but for instance, does it include holograms?

No, no... It is a standard movie in every other sense. It's a drama. There are characters. There are actors. But right down to the framing of shots and the directing of scenes, it is quite differently conceived from any regular movie. I mean, if it was shown on a normal screen, or on television, video or something, it might not even work. Because it is conceived specifically for the process. There are so many things in it... I just can't begin to describe it to you. You have to see it for yourself.

I'm on my way to Marino Del Rey...!

It is such an intent experience that it is simply



Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) is blinded by a mysterious object which hovers above his truck on a lonely country road. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1978).



*Above: Doug Trumbull's stupendous Mothership rises up from behind Devil's Tower. Below: Technicians at the Devil's Tower base stare skyward in disbelief as the Mothership thunders over their heads in the climatic finale of **Close Encounters of the Third Kind** (1978).*



perceived differently.

So from hereon, as well as new theatres, you'll need new writers, not scripting just any movie, but for the actual process.

New experiences, yeah. We need people choreographing visual and psycho-acoustic experiences.

Would the process have further enhanced *Close Encounters*?

Not too much, no. *Close Encounters* is a movie that is specifically designed, shot, conceived as

"Steven Spielberg has seen the test film. He thinks it is incredible."

a regular movie. The films I'm thinking of making would be structured quite differently to *Close Encounters* . . .

I take it that Spielberg has been privy to the process?

Yeah, he's seen the test film. He thinks it's incredible.

He said picking himself off the floor.

Just about! (Laughs).

How can you sit here so calmly, just chatting about all of this and not want to be back over there, doing it, directing the first movie . . . Patience is obviously built into you, or you wouldn't be in special effects to start with.

Well, I try to keep cool . . . I have a crew of people, same crew that worked on *Close Encounters*, working on some aspects of it right now. But we're nearly finished. I just go back and do the recording sessions next week.

Not John Williams again?

No, he's a man who lives and works in Minneapolis, named Herb Pilhofer. He operates a company called Sound 80 and, in my opinion, he is the most advanced composer-cum-recording expert around today. He orchestrates music specifically with 14 channels in mind. He does some very complex over-dubbing to where music and sound-effects merge together and move dynamically during sequences. I mean, it's a whole . . . it's special-effects music, in a sense.

But you've still no idea which the first film will be—or even its title?

No, it will be somewhere between *Brainstorm* and *Hiero's Journey*—could be one or the other. They're both in development. They're both going through changes connected with



The Mothership hovers over the Devil's Tower landing site. The live action of this sequence was shot in an aircraft hangar in Mohile, Indiana and the Mothership footage was matted in later by Trumbull and friends.

what we learn about the process itself as we go along. Whichever film gets made, it will be a highly experimental film.

And highly expensive?

I should hope so!

Hope so . . . ? Isn't a big budget a director's biggest concern, because of the eventual massive grosses the film has to earn world-wide?

That's just part of the headache in dealing with the economics of the movie business. You're obviously there to make money. The real headache is the anxiety the banks and studio executives go through in worrying that it will not make money or worse, lose money. When you're spending a lot of money on a big-budget film, just the amount of money spent day today, and the interest rates, is staggering. So there's always a rush and a push to get it done sooner.

I get a sense from some of the public and

Press that I've talked to, that they're outraged that movies can cost so much. That's the nature of the beast—when you're talking about research and development. Dealing with something that is totally new. It's not just like walking into a New York street and shooting a crime movie or a chase scene. It's not like that at all. It's very expensive. It's very difficult. It takes enormous time and effort—and people have to be paid for it. As a matter of fact, you have to pay the best people the highest prices for a long time to get the best results. That's why it's expensive.

But you've been keeping cool now for three years on this thing.

I just hope it's such a big leap, the impact and experience you get is so dramatically enhanced, that it will really set the way for a new form of entertainment. It will be quite different from just going to regular movies.



Scientists and technicians advance warily towards a dazzling UFO during the closing scenes of *Close Encounters* (1978).

BOOK WORLD

Reviews by Alax Carpenter



SUPERMAN: LAST SON OF KRYPTON by Elliot S. Maggin

I approached this book with considerable caution expecting it to be another disappointment. Instead I found an enjoyable story of galaxy-wide super-heros. It seems I will have to eat my own words (see *Book World* in *Sterburst 5*)—superheroes can work in novels (at least they can if your name is Maggin!).

Finally Superman's full potential has been realised. In empty-three years of reading comics I have never been so entertained by a Superman story. It must be difficult to write stories about such an omnipotent character but Elliot Maggin has succeeded.

Don't be misled—this book has nothing to do with the film although both had (in their own way) "tidied up" the Superman legend and both are well worth the effort.

Published by Arrow Books. 240 pages. 55p.



THE HOBBIT OR THERE AND BACK AGAIN by J. R. R. Tolkien.

This epic tale of the daring deeds of Bilbo Baggins, Middle Earth's most inept burglar, needs no introduction but now a new, illustrated edition is available. On 27th November 1977, NBC tv in America screened an animated film based upon Tolkien's book and it is stills from the Rankin/Bass cartoon (see feature *Sterburst 4*) that accompany this entrancing tale.

Over 230 full colour stills, many of them full page, have been used, but somehow they do not do justice to the story.

Everyone has their own image of what Bilbo, Gandalf, Golum & Co should look like and it is truly disappointing when the artists' ideas do not match your own. It is even more disappointing that much of the art is of a poor standard. The full page reproductions especially show the low quality of the drawings.

It can only be hoped that, as the pictures were intended for animation, they look much better when animated. However, Walt Disney's early material (*Snow White*, *Pinnocchio*, etc.) looks good whether on the screen or reproduced in a book so the hope may be a foregone one. This particular edition may serve a purpose in attracting new readers to the world of Middle Earth: Tolkien completists will also need a copy.

Published by Ballentine Books. 9 1/2" x 9" 224 pages. \$8.95—Import.



DEATH SPORT by William Hughes
Set on a future earth finally beginning to recover from a nuclear war *Oath Sport* is the novelisation of the latest film from Roger Corman's New World Productions. The major protagonists are a Ranger Guide named Kaz Oshay, and Ankar Moor—once a Guide but now fallen from grace. Like a certain Darth Vader Moor's face is constantly hidden behind a mask and that is only one of the many "coincidences" that make one think of *Ster Wars* while following *Kez Oshay's* saga. The Guides have mystical powers similar to those of the Jedi Knights and Ankar Moor hides his face because of the disfiguring he received when *Kez Oshay's* mother (!) forced him from the Guides (so—it was Luke Skywalker's father!).

There are other examples of similarities to *Ster Wars* but the story also resembles a freakish cross be-

tween *Oath-Race 2000* and *Oemnation Alley!* With these varied influences *Oath Sport* could—and should—have been awesome. Instead, although superficial and predictable, it is enjoyable, action-packed light entertainment.

Published by Sphere Books. 224 pages. 95p.



CONAN AND THE SORCERER by Andrew J. Offutt

Conan and the Sorcerer stars Robert E. Howard's legendary barbarian in a brand new story with a promise of more to come now that the problems of REH's estate have been completely resolved. Andrew Offutt has set his story in Conan's youth shortly after the events detailed by REH in *The Tower of the Elephant*. Offutt has managed to capture the feel of the original stories almost completely. "Almost" probably will not satisfy Conan fanatics but the rest of us will see it as a typical Conan tale. Although under a different imprint to *The Magic Goes Away*, *Conan and The Sorcerer* is another in *Aca Books' Illustrated Series of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Once more the interior illustrations are by Esteban Maroto and I tend to prefer these to those he did for *The Magic Goes Away*. At present I know of no plans to distribute *Conan and the Sorcerer* in Britain. *Published by Sunridge Press. 6 1/2" x 9 1/2" 192 pages \$5.95—Import.*

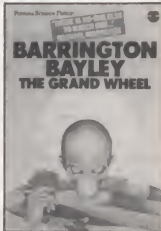
SHAORACH IN THE FURNACE by Robert Silberberg

No-one can doubt that Robert Silberberg writes a different kind of science fiction. *Shadreck Mordecai* is the central character of this new book and he is doctor to the world dictator—Genghis II Mao IV Ken. The year is 2012 and Genghis Mao came to power after years of biological warfare that — even now — leave all but the elite at the mercy of organ rot. This is no ordinary, action-packed science



fiction novel and *Shadreck Mordecai* is no ordinary "hero". He is a doctor who sees no reason to fight for his life with fists or gun. *Shadreck in the Furnace* is a different kind of science fiction and it comes with my strongest recommendation!

Published by Coronet Books. 256 pages 85p



THE GRAND WHEEL by Berrington Bayley

The Grand Wheel is a book about gamblers and gambling. The games are played many years in the future when they and the means of play are totally unrecognisable to us trekked here in 1979. The Grand Wheel is also the name of the Mafia-like syndicate that controls all illegal activity on all the planets within the human sphere of influence. The book centres around the gambler Cheyne Scarra and his involvement with the Syndicate. What happens when he becomes involved in a game where the stakes are control of the Wheel makes very unusual reading. Mr Bayley certainly has unique ideas and an interesting way of relating them.

Published by Fontana Books. 160 pages 80p

For two years a film made by two National Film School students has been surfacing in some of the most unlikely places. *Starburst* has tracked down the creators of *Max Beeza* and *the City in the Sky*, two young film-makers called Philip Austin and Derek Hayes, and now presents an exclusive look at this rare animated movie.

MAX BEEZA and the City in the Sky

Feature by John Fleming

Starburst: How much did it cost to make the movie?

Philip Austin: About £4000. We put our budgets together and came up with that amount.

Derek Hayes: The point is that at film school you're not paying for a lot of things.

Starburst: I liked the credit at the end. Head Grip: Albert de Salvo.

Philip Austin: That's good. Not many people get these things. Few people even notice.

Few people have had the chance to notice the Boston Strangler's name at the end of *Max Beeza and the City in the Sky*. National Film School graduates Philip Austin and Derek Hayes have made one of the most original and inventive animated films since the heyday of Tex Avery and Chuck Jones. Technically, it looks flawless. But almost no-one has seen their movie. It has been shown only at the 1977 London Film Festival; during lunchtimes at London's Essential Cinema in early 1978; and at the 1978 Edinburgh Film Festival and Ottawa Animation Festival.

It is a future world. Poison gas has spread across the planet and the entire population of Britain now lives in a tower city twelve miles high ringed by clouds. Mrs Ron Weetabix is making her way home along a narrow ledge—until she falls off. A clergyman is preaching a hellfire sermon on sin—until he gradually lapses into the title song of *Champion The Wonder Horse*. Max Beeza is entertaining a laughing audience—until The Airship attacks.

The original idea for the 22 minute film came partly from a dream of Philip Austin's and partly from the "strange tower cities" which fan Derek Hayes used to draw at school. Austin and Hayes met at Sheffield Art College, where they made *Custard*, a cartoon satire on the obsessions people have in a northern industrial town. This won them places in the National Film School at Beaconsfield. Because that was "such a dull place to be", they decided

they would have to resort to pure imagination for their next project. It took 18,000 drawings and 20 months to complete.

The film's hero, Max Beeza, is an Arthur English-type spiv, a con-man/comedian/magician, whose stage act is a cross between Bruce Forsyth (constantly insulting his audience), a slightly demented Max Bygraves and (according to Austin) Elmer Gantry—the sort of person whose only talent is getting on well with an audience. Billed as *Max, The Merry Missionary*, Beeza's latest show is in aid of *Bison for the Deaf*.

"Are you thinking?" he asks his audience: "Don't! You can't see if you're thinking." In his hands, a brick becomes a chocolate biscuit. In fact, it *is* a chocolate biscuit. Just as a top hat could be, can be and is a flower-pot, a grog-catcher, a bucket, a catapult for custard pies, a frisbee and . . . a top hat. "Are you thinking?" he yells: "Don't! You can't see if you're thinking. After all, you thought it was a brick—didn't you!" Suddenly shells whistle through the air, blood spurts, people panic, grenades and bodies explode.

The tower city is under attack by an airship. In the chaos, a game of cricket has an explosive ending, a suicidal man has problems killing himself and a drunk can't drink until his head is blown off. The newspaper headlines scream: "War Declared. Win 365 pairs of naughty knickers."

But who is sending the Airship? No-one knows. They can't see because they're thinking. Members of the Soccer Hooligans' Union meet city leader Victor Troutskillet for emergency talks, the war rages on, devastation is everywhere, the bright colours become dulled. Victor Troutskillet forms a Secret Police to stop subversion, Max is excused military service and starts a new show in aid of shell-shocked gulls.

Part of the enjoyment of *Max Beeza and the City in the Sky* is the detail. Small bits of graffiti barely-glimpsed in the background; the baroque architecture; in-jokes and obscure references. Directors Austin and Hayes, in fact, think there are too many details in some places. "The script as we originally conceived it would have made a longer film," says Hayes . . .



As the mighty Airship attacks the City in the Sky even the police are powerless.



Startling Revelation Number 19 shocks the Mysterious Hare, the Deadly Lightshade, the Wicked Stepladder, Max Beeza, Victor Troutskillet and his control console.

"We had to cut a lot of the story," says Austin.

Both are interested in the idea of an animated documentary. "You can make a documentary on a thing that doesn't exist, like that city," Hayes claims: "That's what science fiction does best. It takes people and people's emotions and it says *Right, what IF this happened? How would*

people react? And some of the best science fiction comes out of that. What we wanted to do with all the characters was to try to make the city look like a real place. Shove everything in and repeat things. Repeat characters—have them pass by in the background—people you've seen before—so that it seems to expand outside the confines of the frame and you think there's

something more going on." Some of the details can only be seen on a second or third viewing. "That's where thinking it through quite well is helpful," continues Hayes: "Even if you don't get everything right up-front, it's there in the background and it gives that rich feeling of depth to it." The two directors are also aware that, in the future, people are likely to buy films on videocassettes. An animated feature for that market will have to be able to stand up to repeated viewings. "You just put it on in the evening and just see what you can see in it this time. If it's very, very dense, it will actually stand up to repeated viewings." Meanwhile, back in the sky . . .

As Mr Ron Weetabix sits at home listening to a radio speech by Victor Troutskillet, he mutters: "Rubbish." Arms rise out of his armchair. He is swallowed by the chair, which walks off-screen with him. His son yells out. The settee hits him on the head with a mallet. Gradually, as the film progresses, this surrealism increases. Max discovers who is sending The Airship, but our hero is under the surveillance of four neo-Nazi pieces of furniture, all members of the Secret Police . . . A chest-of-drawers, a cooker, an armchair and their leader The Deadly Lightshade (a standard lamp). They decide to kill Max.

One dark, snowy night, as Max is trudging home, lights burst out of the blackness.



The City in the Sky is a strange mixture of Metropolis, ancient Athens and St Pancras Station. Here the Air ship sails majestically past the upper levels of the City.

Engines rev up. There, sitting on their motor bikes, are the chest-of-drawers, the cooker and the armchair. They drive their bikes at him, but he escapes by climbing up a scratch on the film, which leads him to a caption: *The next scene contains 20 startling revelations—count them all.*

"A lot of the film is to do with Tex Avery, I think," says Philip Austin: "Going up the scratch is a Tex Avery gag. He never actually used that gag, but he must have come close to it. He did hairs in the gate and running up the side of the film—stuff like that. Those sort of free-wheeling gags. Disney knocked them out of cartoons. We saw a lot of Tex Avery films at college and we were really knocked out by how zany the gags were and amazed that nobody was doing that sort of stuff any more. So we're very strongly influenced by Tex Avery. Loony non-sequitur gags... chuck them all in."

And so to the film's climax—the confrontation between Max and Victor Troutskillet, the city's 'Big Brother'—a Billy Bunter figure with traces of Frankie Howard in his voice. The original design for Troutskillet was much thinner; both in name and in style he was originally conceived as a Mervyn Peake-type character. But when his voice was pre-recorded (as it had to be for synchronised mouth movements), the thin character did not work—"So we tubbied him up and turned him into a Bunter-like thing."

But Troutskillet is not the ultimate villain of the film, as we discover in the final 20 startling revelations. In the climactic confrontation, Max faces The Deadly Lightshade, The Wicked Stepladder (from Snow White), an array of gun-toting armchairs and The Airship itself, which turns out to be none other than... No, I won't tell you. But look out for the hare—a rather mangy-looking relative of Bugs Bunny, who turns up without warning and



Startling Revelation Number 15. The Mysterious Hare pulls a switch by a bizarre painting.

without explanation throughout the film.

Max Beeza is well-worth seeing—if it's shown. Part of its success is due to the fact that both Austin and Hayes have also worked on live-action films. They try to shoot and cut animated films as if they were live-action ones. "What we're trying to do is incorporate two things," says Hayes: "One is the live-action way of doing things with its emphasis on cutting—because, in a live-action film as opposed to a cartoon usually you have a lot more cuts and the action is shown through the cuts whereas, in a cartoon, you have things develop within the shot. Also, we wanted to be able to keep on the cartoon things: the kind of graphic shot that leads you into things and gives you fluidity."

For some time now, Philip Austin has been working at the Richard Williams animation studio in Soho. Early in 1978, Derek Hayes worked on BBC Bristol's *Animated Conversations*; a series of six programmes which combined real conversations with animated visuals. And, in Autumn 1978, the two worked together for two months on an animated sequence featuring Sid Vicious in the Sex Pistols' film *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle* (directed by Julian Temple, another National Film School graduate). Austin and Hayes' next project together will (hopefully) be about a man who keeps an alien in his bedroom. Hayes is also threatening a story entirely people with animated furniture.

As for Max Beeza and the City in the Sky, they are still trying to get British distributors to accept it as a supporting feature, if the mechanics of the British distribution system will allow that—there are problems because it was made by students as a student film. It took four years for the brilliantly inventive US movie *Dark Star* to be publicly shown in this country. (See *Starburst 5*) I hope Max Beeza doesn't take that long. It's British, highly inventive, highly entertaining and well worth seeing.

Max Beeza and the City in the Sky (1977)

Starring Christian Rodska as the voice of Max Beeza.
Written, directed, drawn and edited by Philip Austin and Derek W. Hayes.
Cameraman Terry Handley. Music by Nick Symes, Dubbing by Tony Gurrin, Trace and Ginny D'Santos. Colour.
Time: 22mins. No British Distributor.



An armed-chair brandishes its armoury of revolvers and flintlock pistols.



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AND
DEREK W. HAYES

AND THE CITY IN THE SKY

CRIMINON CITY CULPA



New animated movie - see page 44.